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VIOLETTE
OF PÈRE LACHAISE
ANNA STRUNSKY WALLING





VIOLETTE OF PÈRE LACHAISE

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VIOLETTE OF PÈRE LACHAISE

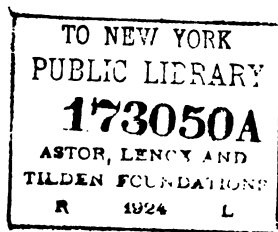
BY
ANNA STRUNSKY WALLING



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To
Rosalind English Walling
My Mother by the Grace of Love

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I
CHILDHOOD

Violette of Père Lachaise

I

THE MONUMENT

IT was night in Père Lachaise. Night rested on the tombs and cypresses, on the marbles whose silent faces were written over with grief, on the flowers lying in sad sleep in their beds, on the little wild gardens marking the older graves. Père Lachaise stirred in the night of life which enveloped it, as if it were aware of the trees and the wind and the moonlight in its midst.

Night rested on the most beautiful and poignant thing in that home of beauty and of death, the monument dedicated to all the dead which stood on the top of the avenue facing the main gate, the epic in

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stone carved out of the heart of universal and eternal sorrow. Night played about those forms of youth and age which were advancing in every posture of agony, with every gesture of anguish, to a door leading straight upon the End, weeping, stumbling, shrouding their faces, stretching out their hands. Night wrapped in shadow the last figure of the group, the woman kneeling with head turned from the common goal and eyes fastened on her past which but a moment ago was the present. Her fingers pressed to her lips were throwing a farewell kiss to the hills and valleys of existence. Formidable and compelling was her hesitation and reluctance, so that death lost some of its absoluteness, and found itself contradicted and defied, suggesting an immortality that no human heart had yet believed in, no mind had conceived. For not death itself could conquer a loathing so deep. Here, at least, if never anywhere before, death halted and failed of its prey.

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Yet her lips were pale and were framed in a kiss which was an unconsummated dying. On the threshold that she was approaching a voice arrested her. Love and sorrow hailed her, memories beckoned, and her tears grew stilled, while she pressed one hand to her heart, and threw that kiss with the other. Thus she passed into death, a flower snapped in two, not by a zephyr, but by a wind that had known the sea, and at first had rippled gently its surface in beautiful laughter, and then in angry revulsion had lashed it to foam.

Violette, who knew the nights of Père Lachaise almost as well as the days, had looked long on that statue of the woman lingering. It taught her the way to die, greeting life from death's threshold, at the end unable to forget or be forgotten of life.

II

PÈRE LACHAISE

THE day Violette and her grandfather moved into the street facing the cemetery, Père Lachaise, she stood in the window of her room above the little florist shop and watched a carriage disappear through the gate. It was drawn by horses draped in black, and was followed by men and women. She wondered why those sad people went where it was so sad. She knew that it was sad there among the trees, that something important and terrible went on there. She turned and looked at her grandfather dozing in his chair, and she felt that in some way he was the key to the mystery of what she had just seen, in some way his weakness and age were related to the place, in

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some way his form abandoned to sleep answered her question. She was afraid.

That day her grandfather told her the story of Père Lachaise, and she rehearsed it to herself at night when she heard the whispering of its trees. In the morning she went there, and turned the door-knobs of the iron-grated tombs, bent over the urns, smelt the flowers, and lifted the wreaths from their hooks. She walked far up the long avenues, thinking that sometimes the dead must rise and lay ghostly hands on the door-knobs, press their faces against the railings and nod to the children playing on the steps. She walked on and on until she felt tired. It began to seem to her that the Place drowsed, or held its breath, and she obeyed a prompting that came as much from the air and the stillness as from within her, and lay down on the cool grass to fall asleep.

This was the beginning of her intimacy with Père Lachaise. Sometimes its trees swayed in the wind, beckoned to her, sad-

dened her, at other times it was a fair garden, stretching sweet in the sun, garlanded with rose and myrtle. She lay in bed at night wondering, questioning, fearing, and in the daytime she walked and played there, or bent her head above the flowers and pursued vague, fleeting thoughts. She had a sense of recent loss, a feeling of loneliness, a consciousness that she had no one in the world besides her grandfather.

Her grandfather, too, had only her, but at one time there had been many others. Once they had been alive! Time, wonderful time, that went on forever and began with the beginning, never gave back what it took away. Time had robbed her grandfather—year by year he had been made poorer, weaker, more desolate, but to her time was giving—she did not know what. She saw no resemblance between her own life and his, nor did she think that her life like his was running out like the sand in a glass.

Often she mounted a hill and looked at the

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city in the distance, and wondered where the dead lying at her feet had lived, whether they had been happy, whether their people surviving them had known that they would die and never return to them except as memories. She wondered if they had been taken by surprise, or if they had sunk back gently into death, drifted out upon its shores as though forgetting every one, everything, as though relieved.

There were times when she fled from Père Lachaise—it was whenever she came upon an open grave, with the red earth lying in fresh heaps around it and a spade just out of the digger's hand stuck carelessly at the side of it. The brighter the day was, the more smiling the sky above it, the more sweet and tender the song of the birds in the cypresses, the more she was frightened by such a sight in that still place. She fled from Père Lachaise when she happened upon a funeral and saw the group of mourners assembled about a bier. It was not enough then to go farther

into the cemetery; she must leave Père Lachaise altogether and seek the living, walk long hours through the streets of Paris, or sit with her grandfather at the counter.

Yet she would return there the next day. She would go back to that loveliness, those spaces, that stillness and peace which yet resounded with a music not to be heard elsewhere; always she would go there and find thoughts trooping into her mind, dreams and fancies one by one filling her heart. She loved Père Lachaise, and she came to know better and better the people that lay sleeping there. There was an old grave on a hill with a tree at the head and another at the foot, and a little wild garden over it—an old grave because the time when her mother lived must have been long ago, it seemed to her. There she often sat and looked out upon the city with its towers and domes, and her heart rioted. If she had a mother, how every one would know, seeing them together, that she was loved better than any mother in the

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world, that she was a mother wrapped all around by her child's love! If she had a mother what a dream and a wonder life would be—a mother all her own! Why could she not come back again? Was there no power to fulfil the heart's wildest desires and deepest needs? Such questions clamouring for impossible answers shut the door of Père Lachaise in her face, placed her suddenly a stranger at its gates, and veiled as with a pall all its gentle beauty.

Violette was hardly aware that her life was different from that of other children. She only felt that it was wonderful and full, that it was good to have a grandfather like hers, though sad and terrible that he must be so old, good their home fragrant with flowers, though so desolate, good the neighbourhood of Père Lachaise, good the meetings to which she was taken and the books she read, since both gave her something that extended beyond the present, that was as large as the world.

She felt it to be even better than she knew. Never was a child more conscious of the fewness of her years, and the length of years before her. What could she not achieve, what could not happen to her? What marvels on the long, long road before her! She would not be a year older for worlds! She was just old enough, it seemed to her. She was not an hour late, had not an hour to spare. She did not hoard the days as her grandfather did, with miserly dread, but she had a keen and an exaggerated sense of their flight. She could not grow reconciled to the law that youth must fade to age, that every beginning must have an end, that growth itself must lead to death. She sought out poems that dealt with youth and learned them by heart.

Her grandfather listened to her, and wondered that a child should love her childhood, should treasure her inestimable possession!

She had been told by some one that in the beginning there was only one man and one woman in the world, and they did not know

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of death. Nothing informed them of it—not the moon and the stars that shone so peacefully down on them, not the warm and brilliant rays of the sun that up to that time had never caused the withering of a flower, the crumbling of a leaf, not the stream that rippled and murmured at their feet, not the great ocean that had never known the wreck of a human life upon its stormy but loving bosom, or the preying of one of its myriad inhabitants upon another. Nothing told them, for death was not and had never been. Then this man and woman partook of an apple that they plucked from a tree. For this death was sent into life for all time—death to all their race, so that whoever was born must die, death to all the races of creature or plant, death to whatever lived. It was the impossible revenge of an executioner judge. With the credulousness of a child she believed and was horrified.

How was it reconcilable with another story—of a Father who created the Earth

and the Heavens, who lived everywhere and watched over all, who loved everything and everybody without end? Her mind from the first time she had heard of God had become impassioned. She tried hard to pierce the blue of the sky in the hope that she would get a glimpse of him where he hung somewhere above the whitest and highest cloud. She thought she knew quite well how he looked—a long white beard, large wonderful eyes, for the rest a good deal like her grandfather, only taller and stronger, with a face smooth from wrinkles, and lips smiling happily and kindly.

That was before they came to live near Père Lachaise. Now there vanished from her mind both stories, now reality lured her, truth called, and her spirit spread itself in untrammelled freedom and scope. For the old man and the child had in common an insistence on the knowledge of evil as well as of good—a revulsion from superstition and falsehood which she had by instinct, he by

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conviction. When she sat on his knees and he talked to her, he told her stories of happy children living with their parents among other children in beautiful garden-surrounded houses. He described the music and laughter, the brilliant and loving teachers, the wise and inspiring books. He told her how there was also travel to distant parts, with the joys of meeting strangeness and becoming intimate with it, the delight of going abroad in the world and making oneself at home in its thought and its ways, converting the romance of the alien into the romance of the familiar and understood.

He told her also of desolation and neglect, of poverty that is penury, of hunger and nakedness and utter ignorance, of clouded minds, natures made hideous by hideous conditions. He told her of tyranny, oppression and bloodshed on the part of the strong, of murder, and robbery, on the part of the weak. He dared speak to her of everything; he reasoned that nothing that was true and known

could terrorise or hurt her. It was only the unknown that was terrible, and with the unknown, fair or foul, he had no dealing. He taught her only what was true, what the mind craved and had a right to know.

In the little shop fragrant with the scent of its flowers and ferns, the old man sat mending tinsel wreaths and wiring baskets, and at his feet crouched Violette, her face almost hidden by her curls, her eyes fixed lovingly on his, her hands resting on his knees, her whole attitude one of breathless interest in his movements and his speech.

III

THE LONG ROAD

HER grandfather was an object of romance. He had known her mother and father, and their little child born and lost before her birth. He was at the source of things! Everything that had happened to him was hidden behind a mist of years. He had been a child once. What he told her of that childhood seemed sad to her, for she found it easy to pity another, and hard to pity herself, and she wished the books for which he had hungered in that past could have been his, and that the school he had longed to go to had been open to him. She wished he had not always had to forego what his heart was set on. All her love could not avail, and not with all her future could she restore to him anything he had ever

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needed and did not have. It was a terrible and inexorable law.

She thought of him, always, and when playing in Père Lachaise she stopped to run back to him with sudden homesickness for the sight of his face. Age, the spirit which brooded over her, was not far away from death, and, though not wholly conscious of it, she went from one to the other.

There was also the law of silence. Of the deepest and most searching things it was impossible to speak—not even to one she loved as she did her grandfather. What she shared with him was that which had concerned her a little while back and had become utterable only because something else was now inexpressible. The reserve of childhood oppressed her as it does all children, and like all children when she suffered she suffered alone.

She played in Père Lachaise, the Champs Elysées of the poor who live in its neighbourhood, but she could not say even to herself

how terrifying at times that playground was. Again and again it occurred to her that in passing the gate and entering its hushed stillness she had gone over to the dead, had made a journey impossibly long, though her own home was but a few steps away! At times it was as if Père Lachaise was telling her a story, sweet but awful, entrusting her with a prophecy, unfolding before her the Future. Yet at other times Père Lachaise was terrible because it was so different from life, and in no way part of it, and yet it was instinct with life, woven in and out with its pattern and its mark. Life was of it but it was not of life, and that was why she was afraid. It seemed constantly to say "No" to her dreams, to her love, to her hopes! Père Lachaise was too strong for her, and she was possessed with a fear she could not name even to her grandfather.

Only when he took her by the hand and walked with her, at the end of a hot day, and lingered with her among the tombs until the

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moon came out with all her retinue of stars, was the sorrow and the fear dispelled, and it seemed to her as if the place resounded with beautiful, stately music. Death, and the thought of death fell from her—leaving her alone with the facts of the world that were beginning to crowd themselves on the young heart, for the most important of which she could find no explanation.

There was much that was wrong. Many people, her grandfather told her, believed that everything would come right, and she believed it too. But what of those who suffer to-day, who have suffered and gone under in the past? What reparation is there for them? She was tortured by a sense of outraged justice. She forgot Paris, the living, and Père Lachaise, the dead, in her contemplation of forces which she could not understand, but which she knew that she must combat. To the whispering trees of Père Lachaise, to the nodding grass over the older graves she imparted wordlessly her in-

dictment framed so early, felt so deeply—her conviction that what was wrong was wrong, that the world, no matter how it changed, could never catch up with itself for having stood still so long, though change it must from beginning to end, and the new must bear no resemblance to the old!

It was at this time that she realised more fully how very old her grandfather was, how slowly he moved, how his hands trembled, how little he read when the shutters were drawn across the one window of the shop. He was very old—yet she felt he had bought something precious with his age, that he was different from the old men she saw sitting on the benches at the entrance to Père Lachaise, or hobbling aimlessly along the streets. He was different from everybody—that was why he was able to care for her as he did, to mother her, and talk to her at length when he sat with her at the deal table in the room behind the shop. If he were not different from others he would not have taken her to

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meetings where people spoke from their seats or from a little platform in front. He never addressed the gatherings, and they were not noticed as they came and went, yet she felt he belonged there perhaps more than those who talked stormily and were interrupted by applause in which she timidly joined.

She had an extraordinary feeling about these gatherings, as if they who were present at them were people set apart from the rest of the world, crusaders, inspired lovers of mankind, fired by a wonderful mission. Her heart beat violently on entering the hall, her cheeks flamed. She saw there people of different nationalities, men who spoke different tongues, but whose eyes shone as they listened to the speakers, and whose faces bore the same expression of zeal and enthusiasm. There were girls and women who came from far away, but who had also something in their faces that made them strangely alike to every one in that company. She did

not call it civic sorrow, idealism; she did not know it for love and for revolt—she only felt that something united them, that something big and portentous made them one.

She bought the little paper-covered books they sold at the entrances to the halls, read them, and found their matter ponderous and complicated. Yet their gist was something which concerned her far beyond anything else—they dealt with the matter of making over the foundations of the world!

Père Lachaise saw her seated under a tree with these thin little books open on her lap, and her brows meeting in puzzled concentration as she read through long afternoons until light failed. Before her were unrolled movements, organisations, concepts like *The People and Humanity*, forces modern and all-embracing. She did not press them upon her grandfather, as she did the books and poems she drew out of public libraries. She thought that his heart was too tired, that he had lived too long in the old world to

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wander forth on a dusty and difficult pilgrimage towards the new that was not yet born. Yet she never forgot that it was through him that she came upon it all—through him, so wonderfully different from every one else.

IV

IMPRESSIONS

SHE began to read when she was very little, and the first story told of a lover who returns to his beloved just as she is being married to another. It was in spring. The river was swollen, little rills ran down the slopes of the hills, bubbled and frothed as with excess of life, the grass was greener than he had ever seen it, the cupolas of the churches of that country shone out green and gold in the bright clear sunlight. Ever afterwards, in all the springs that her life contained, there was something sad to her in the very fulness of that season, something that she distrusted in the clearness of its skies, and yet loved the more, abandoned herself to their beauty the more wholly for distrusting. Happiness everywhere, the

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birds sang, the gentle winds breathed, happiness everywhere and joy beyond measure—but in the heart of man! For something greater than happiness spring existed—for a destiny greater than quiet surrender to love and peace, for something great, heart-rending, inspiring—for something sweet and terrible!

She read another book again and again, the story of a white boy among Indians, and what she remembered afterwards of it was a blurred sense of romance, of mysterious depths among trees so thick the sunlight never filtered through them, of torrential rivers, of wildness and vastness. It was remote, fantastic, with beauties and wonders impossible to extricate or to know one from the other, a tangled web of fancies like the forest itself. Thus was Nature, exuberant, tropical, elemental, brought into her consciousness—thus was her mark laid for life upon the city child.

There remained to her a definite impres-

sion of one other book—the story of the sufferings of a little child her own age. She was mistaken, this mother, to have let her baby go from her arms; she should have known that evil would befall her despite the love which from a distance she would send on, despite her prayers, her tears, the blood she would pour out for her—evil must befall a child separated from her mother! Thus reasoned Violette, and she wept and exulted in the fact that a Fantine existed in the world, she like to whom all mothers, fortunate or unfortunate, were made.

So from her earliest days she had read, and also from her earliest days she had known the theatre. She would never forget the impression made upon her by the first play she ever saw. Tier upon tier of people, music, light, and Violette clinging to her grandfather's hand, impatient at the interval between the playing of the orchestra and the rising of the curtain. She was inspired by the heroine. The love the heroine felt for

her husband she could only compare to the majesty and the purity of the sky, to something greater, more passionate, more wonderful than anything she had ever conceived. And this love, this purity, this passion was distrusted, denied, murdered before her eyes by the unfortunate, half-sane man! She pitied him more than the strangled Desdemona. She saw the pink and white silk dress of the wife, retiring in her sadness, thrown carelessly across a chair, and it haunted her, this dress that outlived the wearer, this dress that looked as though it must be put on again and worn in happiness and joy, as though it clamoured that the irreparable deed be undone.

After that they went often to the theatre, and Violette either read the plays before or after seeing them, and soon was able to speak the principal parts of the characters, to vary them from the way she had seen them given, and sometimes to construct in her mind other plays she had neither read nor seen.

She sat before the curtained stage, waited for the tinkling of the little silver bell, wondered what the scene would be, what spectacle of life would face the audience, her heart bounding with something different from pleasure or joy, but elated as with both of these. To drink in the voice and personality of a supreme artist, and to watch her appear, disappear, and appear again before the footlights, this was herself to be an artist, —in her abandon there was something in itself creative and dramatic. For days after a visit to the theatre she walked about as in a dream, every detail vivid before her mind, living over again everything that had there moved and thrilled her.



V

HER GENERATION

SHE knew children. She watched them on the streets and on the green banks of Père Lachaise. They seemed to her to be apart from the rest of the world, something fairer, fresher, only slightly related to the adults about them; they seemed to be a world within a world. Each child was different from every other she perceived, as grown people were different, yet, as with grown people, they had some things in common which made them all alike. So she felt herself a child, felt that her thoughts, her questions were a child's thoughts and questions, her feelings the feelings of a child. What was it to be a child? Was it simply not to be yet grown, or some-

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thing different from this, and more? If it was not to understand things, if it was to go about questioning, wondering, then surely the same was true of her elders—what was a child?

She gloried in the fact of her childhood, and reached out tenderly towards all the children she gathered about her. Her grandfather and she went on Sunday mornings to the gardens to watch them. Their health, the colour of their cheeks, their eyes, their laughter—that more than anything else—transported her; that, she thought later, was what led her to become infatuated with the idea of happiness. They suggested to her into what a miracle one could turn life if one were resolved to do so! She mingled with them, conscious that they were children together, that they were members of her generation, that they were those with whom she would have to deal later when she grew up, that they were the material out of which would be constructed her future.

She liked to read to them. In one girl she thought she saw something which made her different from the rest, another the everyday type, and she loved her none the less. In the little boy living two doors away she seemed to see a speaker at the meetings she and her grandfather attended. In another she thought she recognised their grocer. She could not discriminate between them. It was different with grown people—there she discriminated; some were friends, and others were strangers—but with children, there was the promise, the sincerity, the sweetness and pathos which made all of them dear.


She thought much when in the company of children, as much even as when at the theatre, or when reading her books, or when sitting with her grandfather at the meetings or walking by herself or with him in Père Lachaise. She thought much, and they were thoughts that led her far away to new realms where laughter and merriment abounded, to

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lands of fair, sunlit slopes, where a brightness and a fulness as of spring prevailed.

The first verses she wrote were about children. It was on a winter day, when flowers were few in the shop, when the grandfather sat lost in himself, struggling to conceal his ailments and his sadness. Some children came to pass the late afternoon with her. They played with the baskets and wreaths, they chattered, they romped all over the place. Violette took part in their games, taught them new ones, threw herself into her part of hostess, and all the time she looked on as if she were an older sister, or as if a mother gazed on those playmates through her eyes. They broke up for home after the first star appeared, which they watched for a moment together from her window.

Then she composed an apostrophe to the Star. She invoked it to look down upon the children, and see them where they stood with their faces turned upwards to the sky. Her grandfather knew that something un-



usual was taking place by the scattered pages on the table, the flushed cheeks, the tumbled curls. She left her chair to place herself at the window and look at Père La-chaise through whose trees many stars now sparkled and shone.

Older people were too harassed, too taken up with the matter of keeping alive, too hard-pressed,—but the children—about them she could weave dreams and hopes, as one wound flowers into a wreath or put rose by rose in a bouquet! Them she could fit into that future which so early had dawned on her horizon.

She sometimes forsook everything and went in search of children, and abandoned herself to their play, telling them stories inspired by her reading and her theatre-going, singing songs, making up dances, inducing each of them to contribute to these performances. But her grandfather noticed that while playing with the children, she was able to get better acquainted with the elders.

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The mother of one enjoyed a book and made her promise to come some night to read it before her man. Often Violette sat writing, for one or the other of their neighbours, letters seeking employment, or entrance into a hospital, or admission for some child into a school or institution. Violette was thus forced to become familiar with the needs and the sufferings of the world surrounding her, to take part in its battles, to go out daily in search of some paltry and mean benefit.

This was the school of which her grandfather approved and he let her stay long at her tasks, and sat watching her as she bent over them, and gathered up and treasured the laboured copies with which the table was strewn. It seemed natural to him that Violette should be called upon to do such things. It was right, he thought, that whatever vision of the future transfixed her soul, it should grow out of her realities.

VI

THE WAITING YEARS

VIOLETTE as a child was conscious of her childhood. There were no old wounds, no half-forgotten joys; there were no eras or epochs, so swiftly did events and conditions follow upon one another, in that period before the sense of time was born! Every day was a finished thing, unrelated to the day before or after.

Whenever she looked back upon it after it was past, it seemed to her that it had been something full of sunlight and warmth, something even gay. There it lay, under a golden haze, in an illimitable distance, and it seemed to her as if from the very first she had been placed at the heart of life, had heard voices and seen a thousand hands stretched out to her in welcome, forcing

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doors for her that she might walk forth towards the free spaces. She would not have exchanged her childhood for any other, since the mass of impressions for which it stood left her only with a sense of its marvels, its scope, its precious accidents, as romantic and exceptional as everything else that characterised the morning hour of her existence.

A different aspect indeed her childhood bore to her grandfather, who could span the few years of her life as though their beginning were yesterday! To him their two lives, hers just opening, and his drawing to an end, seemed cut off and placed apart from all others. She and he were real. They were real in their isolation, their poverty, in their love for each other, in their thoughts and questions. It was the others who were insubstantial, fantastic, to whom it was not possible to relate oneself.

There had been enough sadness and fear in their lives. He could not forget the time she clamoured for bread and was held tight

in his arms instead, and bathed in tears. It was when she was very little, before they had come to sell flowers in the shop in the Rue de Repos, opposite Père Lachaise, when he was searching for work. In the evening he went to a friend who borrowed something for him from another. Violette's childhood—was it not those hours when he sat waiting in his friend's house till he return with the aid he had gone to seek? Was it not his frantic search with the money in his hand for a place where he could buy food at that late hour? Would he ever forget how he bent over her, gazed at her flushed cheeks, at her little hands and arms tossing above the covers, how he raised her and squeezed the juice of an orange between her lips, fearing to let her sleep longer without breaking her fast? Such was her childhood, and his memory of it not time itself could soften. She could forget, who was young, could look back kindly on the past, not he who was old, and had been old then.

Violette remembered her intense interest in the people that came to the shop, with their grave faces and sad manner and lowered voices, and how she watched them cross the street till they passed beyond the Gate, where they carried their offerings and their tears. She wondered what need called them there, what sorrow drove them, what hope they found, what they heard in the silence of that place. It was in her childhood that her heart opened itself to others, that strangers became friends, it was then she discovered that everybody was threatened in the same way, that all knew that sorrow and anguish might arrive to all, must be shared by all. That was what made everybody one, what underlay everybody's love, she thought. There was born in her then, as she sat at the counter sorting ferns for her grandfather, as she bent over the pails in which the cut roses were kept, that sympathy for her kind which never left her. She thought she could remember through what processes her heart

grew gentler and gentler, how her mind followed those she so briefly met, how she suffered their sorrow, loved them for their tenderness, and how the poetry of human life spoke to her and inspired her.

Her childhood gave her Père Lachaise, stretched Père Lachaise as a garden at her feet, as a street to traverse, as a miraculous room of her house, built of sky and sod and whispering trees, with ages of buried lives to right and to left, of people sleeping forever in the arms of eternal time! Mystery was then her daily bread—mystery of the place in the presence of which she had come to live. She learned everything from Père Lachaise—her love for her grandfather even, for she fled from the place as from an enemy and clung to him whenever its air seemed filled with a threat against him. She learned her love of life, in this way too, from the early knowledge which she gleaned of death. Life was priceless, an unrestorable gift, because all that lives must die. Feelings profound,

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oceanic, glorious, were hers, as in revenge on Père Lachaise. So from the ashes of death were created in her the spark and the flame of life! So the pictures of possible tragedies, the crowd of sad fancies that were the heritage of her childhood ended always in something eloquent of the good of life, in a tidings of happiness. So when there rose in her mind the thought of a mother at whose side a laughing, blue-eyed wonder of a baby stood pleading for a tussle and a game, and Violette saw that baby denied because of some duty of the moment, she thought if the mother met her death that day, how her heart must have remembered at her dying moment, with a regret that seared and burned worse than a fatal bolt, the love she might have given and had withheld. It was from such thoughts as these that there was born in her her passionate devotion to life, her reverence for life's possibilities, her standards for perfection of feeling and the expression of it in deed and word and gesture. Life was

brief, was full of hazards! Who could trust it? Who could forget that the place waited, that it was near, ever-present, ever-beckoning with starry eyes and soothing, peace-promising voice, ever-waiting like a mother the home-returning of her children? Who could forget? Who, remembering, could deal with it lightly?

Yet her grandfather feared her familiarity with death, and he thought her childhood a premature old age, and looked upon the influence of Père Lachaise upon her life with dread.

The same was true of her school-days. She remembered the happiness of contact with other children, her love of teachers, her idealisation of the classroom, with its chalky atmosphere, its blackboards, its formidable, straight-backed benches. She could not remember learning anything there—and she remembered struggling with sleep in the close air, irking for the bell to ring that would release her, yet to her it had been a

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happy and important time. He thought only of how little she received in return for what she spent there, how he had sighed as he started her off to school or as he waited outside the shop for the moment when she would turn the corner and run to meet him with her kiss and her account of the day.

To such an extent did they differ in their estimate of those years! Perhaps they were both right—perhaps it was not necessary for Violette to live in order to feel. It was perhaps possible for her innately to understand life, to bear it a wild enthusiasm, to have a vital hold upon the forces of existence. It was perhaps possible for her to have a foretaste of death, a vision of the greatness of love, a flash into mysteries, tragedies of being, wonders greater than the heart can support, than the mind bear to contemplate.

She knew with certainty that not with any one on earth would she have exchanged that childhood, no more than she would have wished to be some one different from herself,

to bear a different name. It was not that her life was perfect—but it was her life, and she loved it. She never doubted her past, and she believed in the years ahead of her. How could she doubt? Had she not known isolation, tragedy, death, stood with them face to face? Had she not met books and men? The foundation was laid, and the rest would be reared, the whole structure, to its last turret and spire, to the utmost beauty and grandeur. All would be fulfilled, and before it was done her life would stand miraculous, symbolic. Out of the bounty of the future it would be built for her, vibrant with love, deep and still with peace, full of energy and action, boundless, yet harmonised to one purpose, marked by an integrity so great that she could not herself understand or be aware of it. She personified the waiting years. They would of themselves let loose torrents of strength. They themselves were the source of wonderful things—the waiting years, her life's unminted gold,

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the inestimable treasure that was youth's inheritance!

If her grandfather's life was grey, it was because no endless journey through years stretched ahead of him. She sought her course as though her eyes, open wide with the look of childhood, were dazzled by the sudden sunlight of existence, were still forming, perhaps, and not yet able to see and distinguish. This gave to her the attitude of one studying and seeking, and she glided among her days full of peace and health, steering herself by the light that the child-soul within her radiated, thinking it came all from without, from her grandfather and Père Lachaise—whom she found so compelling and so vast.

VII

THE GRANDFATHER

IF to her grandfather her childhood was sad, he knew and could never forget that for him there was greater happiness those first few years of her life than he had ever known up to that time. Her loveliness was something he strove to fathom and could not. He worshipped at her little rosy feet, held her baby palms, and pressed them to his eyes, laid his head against her tiny shoulder, feeling that ever afterwards he would be incapable of a small thought, of a feeling of cowardice before life, or people. If he were a vassal of old, with the lowliness and fanaticism of one, he could not bow his knee before his king should he appear before him, could not humble himself before the representative of God, or Empire, were a

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little child like Violette sleeping under the roof of his hut, partaking of his hunger and his nakedness!

He was proud, he was happy, and he bore a responsibility towards her such as some feel for a cause that calls for every drop of their blood. He had invoked her, years and years ago he had willed that she should come to pass. In her voice, in her eyes there was a little of that which had died too soon in him, of what is alive in everybody at the beginning. Waking and sleeping he was aware of her. He tried to imagine and could not how it would have been for him without her. He had a confused sense that before her coming there had been emptiness and stillness, that he had watched age creep on him at times stealthily, at times apace, and it seemed to him he had not sought to ward it off, had not asserted his strength, as now he was doing, had never found himself until Violette found him, a grey-haired, broken old man, and claimed the protection of his

weakness, the companionship of his loneliness, the comfort of his poverty. Violette, humanity in its babyhood, child beyond words beautiful, alluring, prophetic,—Violette fell to his lot in the midnight of his life!

Did ever a child come to a man in this way, at the end, when all was spent, and call him back from the threshold of death, take him by the hand, and lead him gently and lovingly back into the heart of life? Violette's first battlefield (and before she was done she fared forth on many) was the spirit of her grandfather which she wrested from death, a desert which she made blossom like a garden. He feared she would pay for what she did for him. She would give him her grace, and get the manner of his stumbling gait, the droop of his head, the doubt and hesitation of his eyes. She would exchange her youth for the sombreness and weariness of his age.

He had been born among poor people, and he saw life from the angle of privation and misery. The world bore the same aspect to

him as to his grandchild, only he was not torn from the breast of his mother, from the arms of his father, he was not left to be reared by the trembling hands of an aged and helpless man, he was not bereft of companionship with his own. He had had brothers and sisters among whom there existed that intense love which only people who suffer in common feel for one another, and this early training in love underlay his fraternity with his kind, his pity for all people and his pride in them. What he felt for his family, the price he saw them pay, in health, in mind, in the sacrifice of talents, in defeat, he felt also for the larger family, called society.

The world was sad, but life led on beyond the world, with its obstructions, its tortures, its grinding of people underfoot. Life whispered what was true and sweet above the noise and confusion. Life held out her hands filled with gifts.

This Violette seemed to say in that voice

of hers, every time she addressed him where he sat bent above his work at the table, or standing behind the counter at the wall, sadly behung with wreaths and crowns, this he read in her beauty every time his eyes rested on her, this he saw in her gestures. He watched her as she slept. Oh, the curly head, the flush on the cheeks, the little hands folded under the perfect chin! He stood over her as millions of mothers have done since the world began, as fathers have failed to do only to their loss! This child would grow up, and the sun and the stars and the earth would have a hand in her—everything great would contribute to her. Time would carry her aloft through years that she shared with a generation and a universe! She would grow up, and she would never be beautiful and wonderful as she was then. She would grow up to love—a trace of the same smile, the same laughter, the same kiss that more often than not lost itself in mid-air, would be left for her lover. But he would

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never know what she had been and was not—she would be a little like other people when he came along, but now she was the folded bud of herself, the exquisite beginning of something that life must alter, must to some extent harm. O wonderful baby!

Tears fell on the child over whom he was bending. How had it faded away into mist, that sense of the length of a lifetime that he had had those centuries ago, when he was young! He had slept away his time, dulled by over-work, by worry, his strength sapped by his struggle with the wolves of need that were always pursuing him. So most men live, by living not at all. So they wake up at the end to a sense of beauty and glory, and weep.

What good fortune it was to be awake at all after so long a sleep, to be able to raise the eyes to an expanse of blue, to a loveliness and brightness unequalled by anything he had dreamed of in his youth! For a little while only, but what matters it for how

long? He felt beginning in him the desire to live, despite age and illness, at first for her sake, and soon for his own. He was like one who, wandering throughout a night of storm and terror, comes suddenly upon his destination at sunrise.

VIII

INNER FREEDOM

THE mind of her grandfather fixed itself on her future, leaped ahead in an effort to see her a woman among women and men. It was a habit of his. It might be that the passions gathering in her, like clouds for a storm, the fires of love and of revolt, would break out only to consume her. It might be that she would find no direction or outlet, that she would wander among men and women tortured by a power of second sight, by a clearness of vision, a standard so high as to find herself unable to attach herself to any movement, to undertake for long any task. It might be she would prove a victim of her own strength and her own idealism, would soar and get

beyond her goal, would leap forward perilously, following none and being followed by none, would be to the last what she never meant to be, an individual, not merged with the forces of her time.

So much the grandfather, in the nervousness of his love, conceded as possible. No one could foretell what life would do with her. He was certain only that if there were a definite expression of her in some work, that it would of necessity be of a high order, for her work would be herself, the voice of her heart speaking through its hopes and dreams and sorrows, the music of her heart, inspired by her knowledge of life as seen through Père Lachaise, by her vision of the world gained from drinking of the beauties of the human mind, by her faith in mankind which came straight from the soul of man which she read with the eyes of love. Whatever her effort, it would have to be large and instinct with the spirit of a new world and a new civilisation.

Often he had other thoughts. She was so little, and the years were overtaking him, were rendering him more helpless, more filled with unspoken fears, with a tremulous love that spilled itself in shining tears over her young life. She was so little, and the years ahead held decay for him, but for her the beauty of the rose. He was possessed by a feeling of the sacredness of time, by a passion to hoard every minute left to him. He clamoured for time, for a respite from death. He demanded it as he would demand a right held from God.

Violette shared his fear. He felt it in her kisses, in the way she clung to him, and he held her in his arms and asked himself if it were not wrong to let a childhood dwell under the shadow of age and death. He looked at her with frightened eyes, pressed close to her and implored Life for life.

He had other fears, too. When he saw how love flowed from her towards everybody in the world, how love flowed towards her,

so that not one who entered the shop but lingered to speak with her, he began to see in her as in a mirror the vision of other lives. There had been her mother who was about to be married when her lover had come and talked about spent passion, about feelings that age prematurely, about promises that because they are promises are false from their birth. When he had gone away she walked as in a dream to Père Lachaise, and sat for many hours there, then staggered home. Later she had found a friend, and they had turned to each other and joined their lives.

There was himself. How he had loved, and yet how easily he had lost the love of the woman he worshipped! But he married. The old man, in his chair facing Père Lachaise, remembered how he had married to humble his heart, to thwart his destiny! He thought of Thérèse, Violette's aunt, who did not marry, who laid herself down in death at the end of her twenty-five years—Thérèse,

who loved life like a poet and like a poet knew how to surrender it.

And here was Violette. More than later in her girlhood, more than later still when her whole life stood threatened by love, her grandfather was obsessed by a thousand fears for her. Already in the loving and beloved child he saw the possibly tormented soul of a woman.

He could not say when, in Violette's childhood, he had begun to feel that she was exceptional, that she did not belong to herself or to him at all, but to the whole world; that she had something to offer that the world would be glad of and better for having. Perhaps it began in her infancy, when he heard her name the stars with names taken from the flowers; perhaps it was when he overheard the ditties she crooned to herself at night. Perhaps it was when she was most a child and hurt him with all a child's cruelty, when she envied other children and pictured how they lived in a world all crys-

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tal and gold, a world, alas! so different from her own! Perhaps it was when he learned how deep was her need for the mother she had never known, and when he saw how sometimes she turned away from Père Lachaise as from some monstrous thing.

There was the time she discovered poverty. Like a Columbus of the spirit she adventured over the sea of human existence where storms and wrecks abound, where people lie famishing, eaten in and out with want so that the very texture of their spirits shrinks together, becomes grey and death-like. She discovered it from the children of her street, who were hungry and ragged; from the woman next door, whose breasts, as so often happens with the poor, dried up through lack of food, and who came borrowing sous with which to buy milk for her infant. She discovered poverty as a fact, not only in her own world, but in the world beyond her world, in the world which she would enter and storm when she grew up. She saw

the prison walls it built up around people to keep out the daylight. The real martyrdom of poverty was not the suffering of hunger and cold—it was that so much of life was turned to death, so much shut away from the heart's desire, so much kept hidden from the mind. That was where the robbery and the murder of it lay. She saw inequalities of life, so incalculable and infinite that they led to inequalities of death! People died when they might have lived, people went down too soon into their graves, away from the long road which led all around the earth till it came to a vast sea!

That people should be poor and be resigned—that was terrible. That they should range themselves into classes, and not believe that a legacy of joy and power was theirs!

It lay in her power to refuse to be poor—to free herself from everything that had ever limited her. She would not be denied—she would not let life forsake her.

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She would rove in the world, she would plunge forward to find what there was worth knowing and being. There were books. She would read. There were people. She would meet them—the best should not afford to overlook her, or to refuse what she had to give. That was the way not to be poor—it was a way of seeking to establish the last democracy in one's life, and she came upon that way in a flash of imaginative wisdom. It was now in her power to try to think whatever she wished to think, to try to be whatever she wished to be. From that moment she was free.

IX

PROMISE

SUCH was the manner in which the shadows of that childhood lifted, in which Violette became more and more a creature of life. It was a long childhood, for she had the subtlety of a woman at its beginning and the simplicity of a child at the end. Yet it passed like all childhood, in a day, in an hour, in a breath of spring, in the sweep of a wing across the summer sky. Genius sprang out of that early hour, genius that stood not for any one art, but for personality, for richness of spirit, for flashing intuitive intellect, genius that found its first expression in an insistence on freedom and scope, in the extraordinary demand that she made upon life. There was a gaiety in her speech and bearing, as if she had grown old enough to taste the sweetness

of her youth. She had a practical ambition, too. She would seat herself at the banquet of happiness with her grandfather. He who had had nothing should sit and behold his life reborn, refashioned. He should have all the happiness and peace he had ever prayed for for her,—she would make his old age brilliant.

There was the same passion in her demand for herself that there was in the programme that she drew up for the future of the world. She wanted life, more and more life. Whatever life held of good that she would have, and life at bottom, deep down in its very nature, was good—even its sorrows, even its eternal tragedies. Out of the narrowness of her existence, out of her isolation, out of her utter poverty, sprang this brilliant desire for all that was good and large and free, this miraculous faith in the treasures hidden somewhere near at hand.

So the dream came and went in her mind, as she sat in the room the floor of which was

strewn with scraps of ferns and tinsel. She looked at her grandfather bent over his work, and wondered if he guessed how beautiful their destiny loomed before her even as they sat chilled, underfed, tired, alone. She wound her arms around his neck and pressed her face to his, and looked into his eyes. It would be like a play—years of sadness, hemmed in by age and death, and then the world would lie before them in splendour, inviting their feet and their hearts! How? When? She did not ask, she did not know. It was enough that it was possible.

They approached each other more closely now. Avenues of expression opened up between them, thoughts and ideas flowed easily from one to the other. They spoke together of the movement which extended beyond boundaries of nation and race, a movement that, child though she was, she understood to be historic. She believed that it was possible for her, as well as for everybody, to play a part in bringing about the change.

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Violette, cradled by Père Lachaise, wept over and yearned over so long by her grandfather, could grow into radiant, perfect womanhood, could grow into all that is symbolic of human development, human aspiration and achievement, could become a wonderful expression of the beauty and the power of the human spirit. As far as it was possible for an individual to take part in the drama of social revolution, she would find her rôle.

In this way it was decided in that little shop that here was to be nurtured a complete personality, here was to be incarnated womanhood, youth, life, art. Love was to sit at the banquet. The world was to be stretched out at their feet for their use and delight. Henceforth, there was but one thing to do—to free the nightingale in her, to transplant her from the desert into the world's garden. To herself and to her grandfather she was destined for the happiness of genius.

II

GIRLHOOD

I

GROWTH


HER days now lay like a beautiful landscape basking in the sun, still as a lake mirroring summer skies and gentle trees. There seemed to be a pause as if thought had given way to dreams, as if something in her had begged and obtained a respite. "How life slips by one!" she marvelled. "How it glides by like a river shining brightly in the sun—winds like a gentle road among beautiful trees and meadows, up hills and among valleys, and every step brings one to a new prospect, beautiful, arresting, overwhelming. What a curious thing it is that life should so gently and unnoticeably glide past one and yet be so full of wonders, so full of wizard charms!"

There were now just two or three things

that mattered and those she knew, and everything else she had forgotten or cast aside. She knew that the ocean existed. Somewhere beyond Paris it beat and roared and filled the air with salt freshness, and invited the mind to float out upon its vastness. Simple big things like that marked and comprised her girlhood,—she felt the world, in her sympathy with the joys and sufferings of people, felt infinity every time she looked up at a star-dusted sky, felt life each time she entered or glanced over towards Père Lachaise.

Towards people she bore herself gently—with a peculiar tolerance, which she lost a few years later, with their opinions and even prejudices, a tolerance which kept pace with her own strength of feeling and principle.

And there were now facts which she must learn to overlook, or at least to put from her as far as possible—the whole world had learned to overlook them. One must overlook death and the incompleteness of life,



and one must overlook the way the world was conducted. One must not make oneself a party to the crimes and the suffering of the world, one could not lock oneself in the chamber of the condemned to suffer execution with them, one could not enter alone the dark and frenzied mind, and live there in its chaos, in the fumes of the poison of its hatred—Life must become too full for her to allow her to do this.

This is what she did not know in her childhood, what she again forgot in her later youth—but now the dreamy, lovely years demanded it at her hands—now she understood how one kept alive in the midst of death. If ever she forgot, and the facts confronted her, she shook herself free of them as one does from some monstrous invention of one's own fancy.

She was learning to be objective. "Listen to the note of that bird-song—it calls you! See the trembling of those young leaves on the birch-tree, the slowly moving

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clouds in the overcast sky, the black flight of two birds against the gently brightening south—and listen again to the insistent song of the bird singing somewhere at your feet in the tops of those cypresses below.”

She got her joy from a walk in the rain, from watching the fir-trees as they stood breathless, hushed in the cloak of snow, and from the gentle smile in the eyes of her grandfather. She found her happiness in a book the publication of which marked an era in her life, in the occasional meeting with a strange face that set her heart beating, in the occasional perception of the achievement of another as she brushed elbows with him in a crowd, or met his eye by chance.

Violette could have spoken long and realistically about her childhood. There were her grandfather and Père Lachaise and her converse with them, there was the mute appeal of the flowers themselves, to the beauty of which she responded passionately. They had created thoughts in her she otherwise

would not have had, and a feeling of luxury, of splendour, not at all in keeping with the humbleness of her surrounding, wiping out completely whatever realisation she might have had of her poverty. Did not flowers bloom on her table, on the shelf above her bed where the few books stood, on the dresser below the blurred mirror? There were the meetings which stood out in her memory, and to which her mind owed much, for she understood that she gained from them a familiarity with thoughts and people that many years could not have given her.

But never at a given time in her girlhood could she sum up the influences and the interests that prevailed in her life at that time. It was a period illusive, evasive. Time went more slowly—the years glided one into the other without anything to mark them.

Now when Violette walked in Père Lachaise she brought the thoughts and the facts of life into those precincts. It was as if she was sensing the world, was unconsciously

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studying, looking about her, making up her mind to certain things, gathering up bit by bit a far-reaching story, developing within herself the power to generalise, to dream, to aspire, to struggle. This is what the light in her eyes meant, the alert attitude of her whole person.

II

THE CALL OF THE FUTURE

SHE walked and smiled to herself for happiness. The sun on the grass, the white clouds in the sky, the brightness, the quiet broken only by the song of birds, made her feel that there was something about merely living sweet and precious and ineffable beyond words. Yet not about merely living—her mind dreamily contradicted her senses—it is only when one lives out the promise of life, rises to its possibilities, makes come true all that the charm, the tenderness, the gentle loveliness of a spring morning augurs, that one begins to perceive how like a sea life tosses and waves under its multitudinous experiences, each one terrible and great, even the lightest and happiest, each one, the most terrible and the

most sad, capable of being turned into the greatest good, the wildest joy.

Such perceptions, which later would have been condemned by her as coldness to human fate, as a too absolute acceptance of it, in the gaiety of a spring morning, seemed to her natural and inevitable.

She walked on, ever more dreamily, under the enchantment of all that loveliness and the corresponding harmony of her thoughts and feelings. The future called her. In fancy she abounded in friends towards whom she was going, who were coming straight towards her—friends who sailed bravely under a flag of revolt.

How different she was from those who said: "Let the world go on as it can—we are content if only we are let alone, if only we can exist!" How passionately she believed that it was possible to reach all people with a message from another time and another order! What was the inner world of the men who had voice and expression, that

their words echoed in every heart? What would it be to rise and speak to all, to find herself uttering things that everybody must stop to hear? What words would they have to be to reach the soul of man, to kindle a great flame in people, to speak so that all could hear and understand, oppressed and oppressor alike, victim and tyrant, so that all could as one repudiate conditions that divided people, and establish simple and beautiful relations?

The world presented itself to her as a family, no one member of which was less interesting and fundamentally less lovable than another. She had visions of crowded streets, of windows of houses behind which lived people in their various spheres, with their thoughts and feelings, beneath which lay an innate desire and aspiration to unite themselves with their kind. Whether they were conscious of it or not, that was what they were living for.

She had an extraordinary effect on those

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who knew her. She made it possible for them to believe in all the exceptional natures they found in books, to feel near to the great, and intimate with them. A deepened democratic faith became theirs—they saw in her the spirit of mankind, what all could be if the chance had been theirs. For Violette had not made her own chances. She had not been hindered and withered from childhood, the sad visage of life had not borne hatred in its eyes, nor poison in its lips—as it did for the countless millions who are cast naked and defenceless into the streets of the world.

Those who knew her felt that a star was glowing in their heaven, that sunrise and sunset, and the unnumbered wonders of existence were theirs to behold. They learned from her that inspiration was a state of complete surrender of the self which could only be attended by a happiness such as no other experience of the mind could afford. They saw her moving among them, inspired,

gifted, and it made them tender with one another.

To such a nature what could the world do? How could life limit and subdue her? It was in harmony with the new school of philosophy—this tendency to live theory, to adopt and be conscious of ideas only when they are lived. She was the embodiment of this philosophy of love and revolution, of idealism, of democracy. She was a forerunner. She was the Future.

III

SOCIAL FAITH

PÈRE LACHAISE lay wrapped in silence. All day long it had drowsed in the summer heat, lulled by nodding cypresses and singing birds, but now neither tree nor bird had a word to say to the marbles that guarded the dead. Eternal time met eternal death, and they lay down together in an unending sleep.

Violette sat in Père Lachaise. By the last rays of the sun she read a book describing the life and death of five men and one woman who had worked to liberate a people. It did not occur to her to doubt their ways nor to question the theory of their revolt. She felt only their passion, their marvellous abandon, their heroism and their love. Tears blinded her eyes, sobs choked her,

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again and again she closed the book, and remained sitting with sunken head the better to think of their single-mindedness, the better to lose herself in measureless pity for their fate, and in boundless exaltation.

They were hers. She belonged to them. Henceforth, her life must be other than what it would have been if she had not sat reading the unforgettable pages of this chronicle, had not sat weeping for these strangers long dead, and feeling, besides the universal significance of their doom, the unbearable bereavement of her heart. And around her, just outside the gate, people were passing, talking, laughing, or walking their way alone, children were playing, the world ran on as if their blood had never been shed, and the high achievement of their lives never taken place. Around her all were oblivious of the great drama of these few who revolted in the name of the Future and who went to a terrible death for their re-

volt. How strange they did not know facts so important, so beyond words inspiring.

In her own immediate world they knew—her grandfather and that other, the man she called the friend of all her life. She had known him ever since she was a child when he had entered the shop to buy a wreath to hang on the wall of the Communards. He had come often for a little while, and when soon afterwards he left Paris, he sent letters to the little girl and the old man. He returned in her young girlhood. Perhaps he contributed the larger part of her formal education. He read her the great German individualist, and she understood that the individual and society were distinct from each other, and yet one. He brought her dramas which flooded her life with a new light. She went with him to a meeting on the top floor of an old building, and they presented a red card at the door. There was at once an air of mystery and openness

at this gathering, and Violette caught the suggestion of an atmosphere strange to that which prevailed at the meetings to which her grandfather had taken her—something, more free, more abandoned, more extreme.

The girl was not noticed until her application for membership was read. It was immediately opposed because of her youth, and it devolved upon Violette to rise and defend her right. With flushed cheeks and trembling voice, she advanced the argument that thought had no age, that if there were very old men who belonged, and of course there were, then there could and should be the young. It was a matter of understanding and conviction, and she understood and was convinced, had been ever since she first began to think, now a long while ago.

She was admitted. It was at once a registering of her protest against the ways of the world as she saw them, and the setting out upon her journey to the future by join-

ing the forces of progress and of change. Now she was no longer a spectator, now her ideas were no longer theories, but a reality which made their demand upon her. She felt the character of that reality, no longer as a theory or a fact too remote for any definite significance, but as something that made her allegiance to it a matter of course, inevitable as her love of life itself. Thus her girlhood began with a glimmering sense of the people, with the passion for agitation stirring within her, with an idea of the possibility of leading a separate and original existence lighted by truth. Some day, she felt, she would look back upon her girlhood from a height and find it had been beautiful.

IV

A FRIENDSHIP

VIOLETTE could always say in after years that she had known the friendship of a man. In his asceticism he was very different from Violette. "All the beauties of nature and of man are free," he said, "and whatever I have to buy I can almost always do without—for the price I would have to pay would be my energy and my time, both of which are devoted to other things!" He had no dealing with the organised world of to-day. He did not even request a living at its hands. He taught languages privately during a few hours a week as was needed to eke out his bare existence, and he made no further compromise with the economic forces that prevail.

Behind this austerity Violette found not

only an inspiring breadth of intellect, but a nature capable of great tenderness. He was large, and his face was expressive and handsome. His voice, deep and rich, lent something to whatever he said and arrested her attention always. Strength emanated from his whole personality.

He had been nineteen and she seven when they met. Yet she had had a romantic feeling about him even at that time, and had looked upon their friendship as something extraordinary, significant. Sometimes she paid him visits. He lived in a room at the top of a house on a level with the buttresses of Notre Dame—in a room stocked with books and bare of all adornment except that of a faded drawing of Rachel. He had acquired the Rachel in her honour, a little after she came to tell him that she was going to claim Rachel for her elder sister.

She was his pupil. But he knew that he was really hers, that in knowing her, teaching her, reading to her, he was overtaking his

own long-fled childhood. All the women in the world bore a resemblance to her in his mind, and where they were different from her it seemed to him they were in some way remiss.

It was through him that she so early began to divine that there was a supreme idealism, a supreme service, that there was something that transcended the personal aspects of art and love, that there was the conscious, pulsating life of the people with which one could be merged and yet remain oneself. Together they attended meetings, discussed, read, and identified themselves and became intertwined with forces that were cosmic, real, compelling, as well as elusive and romantic.



V

WORK AND LIFE

VIOLETTE worked hard. The time would come, she knew, when she would have to be much more tired than she was then, when she would have to accomplish something in comparison to which that was mere child's play. She would not like to have thought otherwise. Everything in her life was still unformed, hidden in mist, she could foresee nothing, and this was a thought of delight to her; as long as this lasted she knew she would be a child, a child of life, always growing, always changing her state for the better.

Every new day found her facing a new task. That was to live, she told herself, to find that what had seemed difficult yesterday was easy to-day, and despite this to find that

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one's work could never be accomplished or conquered, that it waited for one with the breaking of each new day. This was adventure, romance, intellectual gaiety, and it depressed her to remember how few had the opportunity of knowing what work means—certainly not the poor, who were early taught to toil, but who, no matter how strong the impulse, had no leisure for work, certainly not women who were often in the position of the millions upon millions of poor, limited in time, strength, and opportunity.

She looked upon herself as one of the masses, and boldly realised that when one of the masses becomes an individual, she becomes as great as the race and takes on the stamp of the future.

But how get that control that would place her in a security from which she could not be ejected? How possess herself of such unshakable strength? By developing a talent which would be indispensable, by so keeping abreast with the times that she would

be carried along by the progress of life, sustained by the social forces with which her individual existence was linked.

She saw this in her girlhood, and wondered how people got their grasp of conditions. It was so easy not to work, to contemplate, dream, plan, and not to move towards one's goal. It was so difficult to keep the brain and the nerves tense. Ideas hovered above her head, and did not quite descend within her reach. Something irked and tormented her,—indecision, vagueness, fear, even, seemed to be her lot, the beautiful days coming and going and not fulfilling themselves. There were times when she ran to her grandfather in despair. In her, so much ferment and struggle, so much desire, such revelations and perceptions, and yet often and often she was becalmed in a sea of inertia.

Thus in her strong and vibrant girlhood, the very richness of her nature betrayed her into a feeling of wretchedness and of pov-

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erty of the will. Her resolution, once it became conscious, lashed her to such a passion of endeavour that because her years were few, her strength undiscovered, her talents latent, her life's programme not made out, it sometimes seemed to her that she was destined to fall by the roadside, in full view of her goal.

Unless she found a life-work, the world would grind her fine and grind her small, and an end would come of all her dreams.

VI

THE STAGE

IT came about somewhere in the middle of her girlhood—it came in one overmastering impulse which transformed the direction of her life—with the urgency of a poet's thought clamouring for expression,—it came to her that she would be an actress!

What was the world but a theatre for the performance of tragic struggles and aspirations, for the enactment of a rôle that spans the immeasurable space between birth and death? What was youth but at once the most wistful and the gayest of all plays? To stand up before an audience and portray and interpret life, what could be more wonderful! To make the whole personality a

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medium for the expression of thought and feeling, to wrap herself around the hearts of people, to fire them, to make them laugh and weep, what destiny could be more beautiful?

It was in the exuberance of her girlhood that she conceived the idea of being an actress, and it sprang equally out of her joy in the beauty of human personality, out of her belief in the dreams of liberators and poets that the lives of all could be made beautiful and great. Always she had suffered from a kind of civic sorrow, and had felt that her strength, her youth, her aspiration, her talents were as by nature itself consecrated to the service of the people. She could not know where her existence left off and the existence of others began. And it occurred to her that in being an actress she would satisfy her love of mankind, that it would be one way of engaging in the endless battle with the people, for the people, that it would be one way of belonging to the world and to herself at the same time.

She must be an actress because she was a world-spirit, was dramatic in the sense that life is dramatic.

Under the quiet stars, among the silent tombs, it was decided by her that this should be, that she should hurl herself into the middle of the stream, to make good a promise that seemed given for her at her very birth. Often she lay awake at night, while picture after picture passed before her closed eyes. She saw herself holding a great stage, in a part that was all soul and fire. She saw her audience, and loved it. Her hand waved to it for one frenzied moment.

One need not accept the tragedies of natural law; how then yield to the artificial tragedies of existence? She would show how one must fight these, even if one were all alone in the world to do it; one must combat cruel and barbarous conditions, wanton waste and suffering, insults placed upon yet unborn generations. She would give plays

that did not teach patience with the present or tolerance towards the past.

Because life was anguish, she would cling to it. She would hope because despair was on every hand. She would fraternise with all the world from her stage, would inspire people to revolt and to struggle, would show them the ways of love.

To this end she worked, and her mind revolved about the new drama that would burst on the world, unconventional, unrelated to anything that preceded it, because rising not out of the actual but out of an ideal—towards which life was only approaching. Perhaps she would write her own plays, perhaps she would find words for all she had thought and known of age, and love, and work, and of the new world that must replace the old.

She would add the art of poetry to that of acting! To be a poet! Would she not barter all her years for the privilege? To be a

poet she would break her heart like all poets, would take her vantage ground on the outskirts of the earth.

Her grandfather called her devotion to the stage and her ecstatic attitude towards her own dramatic ambition religious, but Violette laughed at his inability to part with a word because it had been in good repute throughout the centuries of human history. She was interested in religion solely as it affected other people. It had neither meaning nor content for herself, and she was impatient of those who called religious every humane tendency, every fine feeling. Did not religion stand for faith in something extra-human and super-human; was it not a code of conduct imposed upon people in the name of something they could not understand? Was it not a crude weapon in the hands of age-old, barbarous law-givers that found its way even to the present? She explained its dire persistence by the fact that

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so much else that was barbarous still existed—she went further, and said that the basis of life was as yet barbarism, crude and cruel beyond words, a long night unbroken throughout the ages.

Not out of the tendency to goodness, always latent in people, not out of strength and faith in themselves, and hope of the future, and love of life, but out of fear was religion born—out of fear of the elements, out of fear of the hand of fate, out of that fear which all feel who are sore beset by conditions over which they can have no control, and most of all out of the fear of death, out of the knowledge of death and its threat against the first and most vital of all instincts, that of love. Love was the strength of man, and religion the weakness of that strength.

Violette asked herself whether in that day which she and her friend foresaw for the future of the world, love, too, would not grow different in nature from the love we feel to-

day in our half-lived, thwarted existences, whether then, love would not meet the truth of death triumphantly, and with a glad heart.

VII

THREE ALTARS

THREE altars existed for her in Père Lachaise,—the tomb of Abelard and Heloise, the tomb of Rachel, and the monument to death that stood facing the gate.

Abelard and Heloise—they had killed love and abandoned each other, and they lay together under a canopy of stone, side by side, their eyes closed in death, their hands devoutly clasped, married and divided forever. They who had given up their love for the sake of the world, for the sake of what they called religion, how many worlds would they now give up to regain their love, had they the chance? Violette asked how many lovers there were in the Paris of her day that would do as did these ancient Parisians. In

the future of that world for which she lived, love would not thus be slain.

At the tomb of Rachel, she worshipped art, and it seemed to her that of all the destinies that lay buried here, hers was the one she understood best. She had divined a little of the passion for art, even before her studies for the stage began, through reading and frequent visits to the theatre, through roaming on long afternoons in galleries and museums, and through her thoughts on her walks of what it was that lured and enchanted people, of what it was they really loved, of what the goal was towards which they strove. Art always brought to people something they had not known before, but which they recognised. Had Rachel been an actress, she told herself, she would have found something to do that would have brought her to the people. Had not her grandfather striven, in that youth of his, towards the people? He had forgotten. The fire had died out, but in her it burned

with a steady white heat, threatening to consume her girlhood, her art; stretching tongues of flame even towards her dreams!

She would reach the people with her physical presence, with her voice and eyes and hands, with her passion and ideals.

VIII

THE CRUCIBLE

WHEN Violette, as a result of all her studies, received an invitation to read before the Academy, she held it and pictured herself on the stage before those austere judges. She had no fear. In a flash her idea took shape and formed itself into something almost audible. She saw how she must perform her task, the amount of strength she must put forth. Then it was over: the picture vanished, but she knew that when she came to prepare she would remember.

She took counsel with herself in Père La-chaise. It was a strange chance, and to her excited mind an omen, that she found herself at the tomb of Rachel, and there she read her part. Was she flaunting her life

in the eyes of the dead, those eyes that had burned their will and their meaning into the multitude?

A mist began to fall, followed by a fine rain. Violette leaned against the cypress that stood at the head of Rachel and glanced at the low clouds that hung over the cemetery. The tombs looked black and chill. It was difficult to believe that Paris existed, that just beyond the gate there lived men and women and children. More than ever before Père Lachaise seemed the place where all the afflictions of the ages were perpetuated, and she bade farewell to Rachel sleeping in her granite home under the summer rain.

When the great night came, and she had recited, words of praise fell on her like tangible things—so little was she able to bear the ovation she received. They broke over her being like waves, until she began to believe them and to return the pressure of the hands that pressed hers, to take note of the dear,

moved faces of the people who applauded her. She stood on the platform in the midst of a crowd that pressed forward, with something wild and sweet in her eyes, her arms clasping the roses that had been given her. She thrilled with the excitement which only an audience inspires, with the passion to be at one with it, to give love for love. She seemed taken out of her life into something wider, freer. She had suddenly broadened her scope, mounted on inspiration into a new existence.

They walked home from the theatre. Violette's eyes shone in the dark, her hand rested on the arm of her grandfather. Their friend was with them. She tried to tell them what she felt. Then she grew a little sad, a little depressed by a subtle threat that lurked in her good fortune, a feeling that it would not last half long enough, that what had come like a sunrise might go at sunset

In the middle of the night she slipped

from her bed and put her head out of the window. The air struck her shoulders; she was poised as if to fly out of the confines of her room, and the waving trees of Père Lachaise, black in the faint starlight, signalled to her. Yet it seemed to her that life was an ascending scale of happiness, expanding and stretching beyond her knowledge and conception, with days that were years, years that were eternity.

What was Père Lachaise saying to her this night? Even should she die in youth, it would not be true that she had lived in vain—forever and ever the fact would remain written in the course of the stars, that she had lived.

IX

LOVE AND INSIGHT

IF she made many friendships it was because at that time she was possessed by the innate beauty of people—a democratic passion burned in her. She would gladly have spoken to people on the street, in a car, at a public gathering. It did not matter how far removed their life was from hers. Among her friends were workingmen to whom she would have seemed strange, were it not for her sympathy which made nothing that was important to them distant or inscrutable to her. It took strength to be so fully alive to other people—a vitality which perhaps she lost for a little while later, when she fell in love and again when her art took a firmer hold upon her. But now, she

was fortunate, she had time—infinite time for everything, it would seem.

She saw the world in the light of growth through struggle. The sun was shining, winds laden with perfume were blowing beauty, and freshness, and budding youth everywhere—a world that lived in a kind of everlasting spring, but which suffered death and destruction, nevertheless, every day, every moment of its existence. So much that was waste; so much that never pierced the weight of the soil towards the air above, so much that was unborn but willed itself to be; so much that having come up went down again in misery and death.

It was the spell of Père Lachaise, laid upon her so early, from which she would never emerge, and which made intense, and dear, and difficult every aspect of life. Was it this that endowed her with her rarest gift, the power to imagine love, to understand its marvellous rôle, to hunger early for its ineffable sweetness? She attracted people.

It was strange and startling how many different types of men thought her born for them. Violette, in kindly humour, confided to her grandfather, and laughed. If one was right, then all the others were wrong, and yet each believed himself to know with unmistakable absoluteness.

The thought of love had an extraordinary hold upon her mind at this time. She was modern, inasmuch as she knew that she must develop herself, educate herself, fit herself for some work that would take all her strength. But she was also of the past in her full expectancy of romance, of a personal union with some one whose coming to her would mean the utmost of happiness that the heart could support, the utmost of feeling of one human being for another. She combined all the hopes and the longing of the woman of the past dreaming of her lover, with all the ideals of the modern woman who aspired towards taking a part in the adventures and activities peculiar to the present.

She once went with a girl her own age on an outing, but how foreign she felt to her companions, with their half adult love-making, their open intriguing and flirting! They had picnicked in a wood, then danced, then supped, and taken a Seine boat back to Paris, the girls and the boys arm-in-arm, laughing, openly kissing. She sat and spoke to the youth who was allotted to her with a seriousness which flattered as much as it astonished him, and wondered how she could the sooner get away to herself, to her grandfather, to her friend, to Père Lachaise. She could not understand a light kiss. Had she been drawn to any one there, or elsewhere, it would have meant an upheaval in her whole nature, an impression to be carried through life. It was as if the weighty big things with which she had always lived hung their atmosphere about her.

The time came when she asked herself whether she loved her friend. She had always found a home in his presence. Her

hand sought his impulsively, naturally; whenever he was in the room, she chose the seat nearest his as if it must be so. She addressed her conversation to him, and her unspoken thoughts. She never separated him from her life, always saw him in the centre of it. She would go on and on because she was young, and he who to her youth seemed mature beyond change at thirty, would help her, rejoice with her, go along with her as far as she went, though for himself remain perhaps the same contemplative spirit with two absorbing passions—that of the revolutionist for his cause, and of his love for her, but making no step towards either, watching and brooding over both, like an elder brother.

Did she love him? Did her content in him, and her admiration for his qualities, her eagerness to be with him, her demand that they spend many hours of each day together, mean that she loved him? She asked herself this question, put to her first by him. For

the time came when a conviction flashed on the lonely spirit that Violette was his.

She was then eighteen, developed beyond her years, and though he said to her and to himself that she was too young, that he could not call her out of her life to join him, and so, perhaps, impede her progress, and that she must go on to her goal even though it might lead her away from him, he could not admit that it did not devolve upon him to declare his love as soon as he became aware of it!

His love and hers was a fact which not only they must not belittle or overlook, but about which, henceforth, they must make their united lives revolve.

They were walking hand in hand in a park. A rainstorm had descended on them. They had been to a meeting, had discussed the speaker, had read for hours together on a bench, and when the rain came, and the lightning, she clung to him, and he kissed her.

She felt helpless, ashamed. She was con-

scious of insincerity, she had never believed it possible that she would ever tell him what was not true. Yet, in fact, it was true. Sweet and wonderful as his kiss was, she had not wanted it.

With the rain drenching her and him, and the lightning rending the air, in silence they made their way towards her home. She would never again have to ask herself whether she loved him. He would never again have to ask her that question. They knew, this was not love.

By her ungiven kiss, by her sudden fear of him, by the misery in her heart that a dream for him, risen she knew not where or how, was to be dispelled like mist, by her wonder why it could not be for them who were so close—by these she knew that the friend of all her life was not the beloved whom the waiting years would reveal

He made no effort to win her love. He could not allow himself to bear down upon her with his superior strength, with his

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greater experience, with the indescribable radiance of his vision of their mutual love. Never again did Violette hear a word of love from him, nor catch that ardent glance from his eyes which before this night had so often broken over her like a sun.

X

INTENSITY AND HAPPINESS

AS she read and worked and broadened, and came more and more in contact with people, she pictured life in other terms than those of Père Lachaise. It was no longer a simple journey through the world that ends at the Gate, the same for all. Life fulfilled itself by its variations; it was different to every one and the difference was so profound that the imagination could only accept the fact without grasping its extent. No two people in the world ever lived the same life, nor were ever the same,—if they were, love whose task it is to seek to bridge the roaring seas that toss and break between people, would have no miracle to perform

Every human being was an entity, a

creature who belonged to himself always, whose life none but himself could live—if his nature rushed him into the heart of existence where beat the lives of other people, it was only another form of fulfilling his individual impulse, of expressing his separateness. How then think of birth and of love and of death generically? How can it mean the same to all? How can it be the same?

A long basking in the sunlight of girlhood for Violette, during which time she saw the manifold ways in which life transmutes life. So was it possible to live that there could be no death, despite the fact that the gate of Père Lachaise opened hourly. So was it possible to live that even in dying one came away a conqueror, lying down among the flowers to rest and to dream.

She did not know how this was achieved. Not yet, she told herself, was it possible for her to find the way which led through Père Lachaise and beyond, to vistas of experience

so vibrant, so intimate, so beyond the grasp of the mind significant, that they set all the seeming laws of nature at naught, and at the very last transformed death itself into something different from what it was.

Violette in thinking this had not deserted the realism so early impressed upon her by the teaching of both her grandfather and her friend, and the silent influence of Père Lachaise. She was not reverting to mysticism. She was allowing her mind to soar past the actual, past the usual, to possibilities suggested to her imagination by both. She was not wandering from the realm of fact. She was dedicated to the discovery and practice of new forms of life, and though as yet she had succeeded partially only, and that subjectively, though much that was around her had already tried to beat her into a given form, nothing, she told herself, would induce her to desist from the primal impulse of her whole nature, to be herself, to find the utter-

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most of happiness and intensity to enjoy, to live many lives in one, to live so her own heart said: It is well.

Her materialism told her that no individual is detachable from his environment, but neither is the future unrelated to the present, and for that reason she could hope to reflect distant forces, not yet incorporated in the present, to be a creature of an environment that had not yet come to pass. She was transitional, and she expressed the Future. She heralded its truth. She embodied it, she was its living witness.

So the resolve made in childhood that she would seek happiness extended itself in her girlhood to something deeper. She would so live as to make herself stronger than her environment, stronger than fate, than natural law. She would turn tragedy into joy, she would set at naught death itself. Sunlight and flowers and beauty, wonderful relaxations, romance, but never ease, never indulgent, cloddish ease—she saw herself

frankly a pleasure-lover, in at once the most simple and the most serious sense, a person enamoured, whose passion never abated before the forces of reality.

This troubled her friend. He thought it not enough that she knew and felt the great facts, such as the brevity of life, and the suffering and injustice of the world—she should know the bitterness that those suffer daily who are not, like her, protected by the power to live in themselves—the stabs to the spirit, the tortures, that people constantly suffer at the hands of others,—did her optimism ever deliver her into the City of the Dreadful Night where the average human being lives

It was impossible to go about with the elation of a Violette and know life. How reach her with his knowledge? She found it possible to laugh, to sing, to dance, she wrote, she indulged in long conversations, she luxuriated, drank in sunshine, rain, woke early for a glimpse of the sunrise, walked far

to see a sunset—she read, again and again, her favourite books and poems, she bridged the gulf of years between her grandfather and herself, and she made of her relation with her friend something stronger and more wonderful than ever friendship was—so much vitality troubled him, angered him. It was possible only, he thought, when the heart is asleep, when the eyes so wide open to beauty, are shut to the thousand forms of suffering that beset the world. He undertook to point them out to her, to suggest them whenever she wandered away into realms of her own, he was impatient with the warmth of a sympathy she expended, as he thought, too equally, too liberally. It was partly the unconsciousness of girlhood, partly its strength and power to recuperate from shock and desolation, power to overlook, to glide past on the drifting years.

Ah, she exclaimed, what mattered it all, since the world was being reconstructed, and she was aware of her part in the general

change! What mattered it if she did not know precisely how people lived, since her feeling for them was right! Of what avail would a robe of sackcloth be to her spirit decked in joy! Was he not pleased that she had the gift of feeling that happiness which he would wish all young girls to have? Did happiness ever harm any one? Could he think it made her cold to their principles, cold to her work?

She dared be happy! In a world of death, in a world of suffering, she dared be happier than she could express, she dared be grateful for life as for a boon too great to conceive. The beauty, the sunlight, the peace inspired her—the little singing insects, the rustling of the leaves, the birds, the flutter of butterflies, with velvet wings broad spread and at rest in patches of sunlight at her feet. These things spoke to her, challenged her to send on her voice of gladness and of song, far out into the world until it reached even her martyr sisters buried in

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dust and darkness in the factory, her hero brothers in Arctic prisons.

The waiting years would carry in safety the marvellous burden of her song the message with which they were freighted.

XI

JOURNEYS

SHE was beginning to feel a vague restlessness, was thinking whether there was not something she could do in the present, outside her studies. The unconscious years of girlhood were towards the close of that era taking on a new character. She hungered for time to pass; she had a way of saying, "When I shall be older, when I shall have been graduated, when I shall have travelled." She was feverish for the time ahead, and yet fearful lest it arrive and she find it had not fulfilled itself. It took so long to do anything at all, to find voice for the thousand messages of the mind to the inner self.

She was beginning to look about her and

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to rouse herself from her speculations, to put by for a while her thoughts for social restitution, and to think of simpler, nearer things. The artist soared, aspired, worked, and was content; the girl found herself dreaming of distant parts, of new-found friends, of a life somehow different from the one she had always led. And in her mind she already made these journeys away from Paris and Père Lachaise, from her grandfather whom she loved better than ever, from her friend to whom she was just growing up, perhaps. The whole world stood waiting, and now was the time for their tryst, now when she was young and eager. Perhaps later there would be a post she could not desert; later, to the young girl, was far away when too many unforeseen things might happen.

The world was waiting, and she was yearning to rush to it, to voyage and journey over its areas. Lost as she was in her studies at the Academy, she yet felt that a new light would flood her life could she travel in

the countries of which she had read much, and whose daily history was the same, she was certain, as that of the people who lived in her street. There was romance in the fact of difference of language and of climate, of mere physical distance, romance in the study of their tradition and literature, and above all, passionate interest in the quest for the spirit of revolt wherever it might be.

She pictured herself on a village green near a pond. Night was falling, but the crowd of men and women that had left their huts and fields to hear her message, and to tell her of their condition, did not think of leaving. The women held sick and starved babies in their arms, and tried to still them at their shrivelled breasts. And when it was over, and she had been made to enter and partake of their bread and salt, she sat with them as a long-lost sister might, talking intimately and lovingly, and being loved in turn. Something that had burned in her heart many years had there been expressed, and

Violette fancied herself returning from this voyage with memories that would last her forever,—memories of people as they live their pitifully short day under the sun and stars, memories of colossal suffering in narrow existences. Oh, they were waiting, these people she could call out of their homes and their fields—they were waiting, and she was coming.

She pictured her travels otherwise too—among those who had found themselves after having been lost, or among joyous, free spirits who knew why they lived, or, not knowing, were too happy to ask. She pictured herself going far and wide, without haste, at home everywhere, entering into converse with all, making unforgettable friends, expanding in proportion as she conquered space, growing even as her horizon grew.

She pictured travel apart from people—that, too, was possible—mountains whose snows grew red as blood dyed by the evening sun-glow, whose lakes were black and cold,

whose valleys smiled, ran with rivulets and glistened with water-falls.

She pictured the sea, which she had never known, heard its voice in her mind, stood wide-eyed on its shore and said that at last she knew what drama was! The sea could teach her more of tragedy than Père La-chaise, it laughed where the other dropped silent tears of pity—it laughed and mocked, and yet inspired.

She was on the ocean. White birds, hundreds of miles from the banks, circled close to the water and seemed at times to be pulled below by the waves. They rested a little, floating in the air with wings stiffened. They, too, called to her strongly.

III

YOUTH

YOUTH

AH, swaying grain in the broad fields, studded with cornflowers and flaming poppies—Violette has borrowed of your grace, Violette is singing down the long furrows, looking with glad eyes to the right and left, and up at the clear sky. Violette is harbouring an hour to be remembered in chill, grey winters, long after, when her heart gets a little sedate and numb after the tumult of the full years. Violette is becoming acquainted with the earth as she walks in the fields and along the river banks. She begins to understand why it is called Mother, this tender earth. It has an almost simple loveliness at times, but at night when the stars flash all around it, it takes on a limitless grandeur.

Is it this that keeps you happy, Violette?

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This, that the earth is beautiful, the morning alluring? Do bright clouds and the blue river winding among tree-clad banks, and flower-studded grain fields inspire you with the throbbing happiness you now feel, with the winged thoughts that carry you to the unbounded future?

No, not these alone,—the earth and its beauty are but the reflex and the expression of life itself, that force which is behind all the forces of existence. Its beauty is but a testimony of the genius of that which is behind it all, the nature which has breathed spirit into it and a meaning beyond any meaning, and a purpose so vital as to seem purposeless and accidental. Ah, the romance of the beautiful earth! cried Violette,—upon whose bosom our lives begin, where also we end! Ah, the surpassing, the exquisite beauty of this earth!

Speak softly, O heart, lest sorrow awake! Hush your exultation, O soul! Dream, but utter no word—lest sorrow awake! For the

heart may not bear for long unbroken happiness. The sky becomes overcast, the smiling prospect grows dim; suddenly something recalls the end of all things, the end that comes so soon, that waits always at the close of the brief day, the fleeting moment which is human existence.

Steep your heart in the gentle beauties of this morning, Violette, drown your eyes in this freshness, breathe deep of this air, perfumed by flowers and new-mown grass, wondrously broken by humming of insects and whirring wings of birds, fling out your arms to the morning as it greets you—in this way will you gather strength for the work which seeks you out of the world's terrible need. In this way will you gird up the years before you with memories of happiness that shall become weapons; in this way will you lift your spirit to a deeper faith, an adoration of life which not all the combined foes of the world could quell. Embrace the wonders of this morning, Violette, as you have that of a

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hundred others since you were a child, as you will again and again before night folds you in her arms forever, but sing not your joy too loudly, name not the beauties as they flood your being, vaunt not your riches, lest sorrow awake—that sorrow of which you were never free, which will not free you before it frees the last of your fellowmen.

I

GERVAIS

IT was more like a thin mist than rain, and the air was warm. Violette had visited all her old haunts. It was on her part a kind of farewell, for she felt that after to-morrow, when she would in reality have begun her career, she would never again be the same. She was on the threshold of a new epoch. She had left the house depressed, possibly through nervousness at what was before her, and had kissed her grandfather tenderly and hovered over him so long before leaving that he laughed at her and asked if she meant to return.

She was now walking rapidly towards home because evening had come and the lamps were lit on the bridges. She fancied their red reflection was the blood of suicides,

those pitiful hosts who to-day find a welcome only in the sombre depths of the river.

She looked up and met the eyes of a man standing on the quay. She stopped. Was it her fancy brooding upon violent death that invested his face with tragic purpose? His pale, drawn features bore a melancholy so settled that Violette felt she had no words to utter before such grief.

But she stood spellbound, motionless, and insistent.

Suddenly she said, "I do not want you to die."

"Why? Why?" he murmured.

They remembered afterwards that she had taken his hands, and that slowly they had moved away. Her human presence had penetrated the isolation of his soul. Together they went to the home where her grandfather waited.

Violette forgot her art, her grandfather, her vision of the better world that lay like a flower on her soul. With all the impetu-

osity of her youth she tried to reach Gervais. For she took him, and his sorrow, his memories, the broken promise of his genius, his shaken faith. She loved him.

How did it begin? Not because of anything that she could name or otherwise express, did this feeling rise in her at his presence, or at the mere thought of him. He haunted her. He was practically the first man she had ever met in her youth, the first man of her own generation, and from the first, she told herself, she had loved him. But why? How? Why must it be he, of the millions and millions of people in the world, and when she looked at him she sometimes asked herself, how can it be he? Surely, off in the future was another—some one else, some one nearer, some one far more like herself. This was just a trick of the Spring, a trick of the bounty of youth, to seize upon this man and say that it was he!

If Gervais did not love her, then there might in the future be some one else whom

she would love and by whom she would be loved. She admitted it, and yet—it had no meaning for her. She resented the thought of such a possibility, resented the existence of that other personality that waited somewhere behind the years. He would not be Gervais. He would bring her happiness, love, but he would not be this man whom she loved without knowing why or how, from whom she asked nothing, and everything, this man who was thrown across her path at this particular time, when she was young, and free, and alone—as never before nor after.

For before anything else Violette was a lover of love. Underlying everything all through her youth, beginning even in childhood, was her infatuation with the idea of love. It was because she asserted the existence of love that she could afford to be gay, could afford to be an artist, could afford to drift happily and joyously on the bosom of life, looking about her with almost wild eyes at the beauties to right and left, the soft

dales, the green pine-clad hills, beautiful in the morning sunlight or flaming copper-like at sunset.

As she grew older Violette began to see a face somewhere behind all the other faces in the world. It was that of a man who had freed himself from the weight of superstitions and fears that oppress people from their birth, and adventured far into untried ways of thinking, conserving his own life, never yielding his right over himself, not knowing how to halt, how to lessen himself. It was that of a man created in struggle, in a transitional time in the world's history. It was the face of a great man, and of one who might be educated or uneducated, rich or poor, for before all it was a universal face, marked deep with the wisdom and love that belong to all mankind.

When love came all things might happen to her—she might have to think new thoughts, she might become different altogether in some subtle, strange way. Love

would plunge her into new worlds, would be another birth. She would feel what she did for her friend and more, what she felt for the striking new faces she encountered in her work and more—more and differently. For it would come with a conviction that here was a force that changed her life, that compelled everything to begin all over again, that drew her to itself irresistibly for all time.

Perhaps not all people were able to feel such love, or, being able to feel it, were fortunate enough to encounter it. She did not know how it was with her, or how it would be; only her faith was sure that such things happen, that it is life's greatest miracle, that to hold the heart in readiness for it was in itself good.

He had loved, and she whom he loved had died. He did not think there was anything more.


If he had said this in weakness or weariness—but he said it with a face glowing with strength, and with a mind open, a spirit

flooded with light. His suffering was hidden beneath something deeper than suffering. Violette had never met any one so master of himself, and yet this man had been about to die!

His beloved had been the soul of a group of people who believed themselves pioneers of a new time. When a crisis came and the people were starving, she helped organise a demonstration which was scattered by the militia charging on the people with the bayonet. She and he were well towards the front, and he saw her fall. He described how he leaned up against a human wall, and how he tried to open his eyes to see if she had risen, and how he caught, through a rain of blood, a flash of sunshine, a stretch of blue sky before night closed over him.

Yet it was not the wanton murder of his beloved that brought him to the brink of death. It was something more terrible than that, and he tried to tell Violette of the despair which laid hold on him the day of the

funeral when they buried her and the other slain comrades and dispersed to their homes, beaten, helpless, without strength to retaliate, and seemingly without a plan of ever meeting again in an organised form. The conditions that he saw in the world called for something more than pleading or complaint. They called for action. They called for revolution. They must be replaced by others, human, civilised, natural—they must be replaced at great cost, by the consecration of a whole generation of men and women. That was all. That was a programme simple and easily understood, easily undertaken. But now there was no longer a movement dedicated to the carrying out of this programme. That is why he had grown suddenly tired and why he had sought in vain for an impulse or a reason to go on with an aimless life. He had found himself suddenly bereft of social hope and yet all his life and even his love was based on this hope upon which he had spent himself.



II

FIRST-LOVE

VIOLETTE ministered to Gervais. She wanted more than that he should be willing to live because she had found him; he must live again as he was before death and disillusionment and defeat destroyed him. This would be a miracle, but Violette believed that miracles could come to pass.

She went to see her friend. He led her to her old seat opposite the portrait of Rachel; then he looked at her. The sun was setting over Paris, gilding the green of the Madeline and throwing long shadows over chimneys and roofs. From below faintly the murmur of the street stole up. It seemed to her friend that she had grown more beautiful, her expression had more sub-

tlety, her smile and look were, as always, brilliant and tremulous as though half-afraid to reveal the longing of the soul, the unmeasured delight she took in life and people. To-day there was something mystic about her, haunting. "You overtake us who are older," he said, and looked so kindly at her that the tears rushed to her eyes. He understood that she loved, and he feared for her, for of all the artists of her day no one seemed younger than she.

Gervais too had never known that any one could be as young and free as she. He was drawn by the simple and obvious facts about her, her brilliance, her sensitiveness, her hungry-heartedness, her thoughtfulness like that of a serious and beautiful child. Before long he ceased analysing and appraising and felt that they could really continue their life together. With her he might still reach the heights of which he had despaired.

This he discovered one night when Vio-

lette was very beautiful, as beautiful as she was when she first appeared to him. Her grandfather was in the room, and he put a shaking hand on his shoulder and looked into his face. Violette was impelled to rush forward to thwart the purpose of the unspoken prayer he was making to the man she loved. She saw her grandfather step aside, saw Gervais approach her. Her hands flew to his; in another moment she was returning kiss for kiss, and before her closed eyes there passed grey tombs and trees, vast audiences, her mother, whom she fancied she saw clearly for an instant, her grandfather, and lastly and always Gervais's face bending above her, his eyes that had gone beyond the grave and had returned to her, his spirit that had died the better to reach and love her.

III

STERILE GROUND

OH, my love, I cannot believe in your reality. It is too good to last in this implacable world. What if the time should come when you would not be here where my eyes fall on you, my arms reach towards you where you sit within the sound of my voice? Oh, my love, come and comfort me. Can not we two defy time and death?" How her wild heart, casting such shadows and asking such questions, paid for her joy!

At first she felt the humility of love—a deep humility beneath all her pride. A glorious star was shining over their life, but who could say it would never fade from their sight? Yet should it be so, she could not live, she thought!

She felt that in her fear itself lay danger to their love. If only she were more confident! To be loved she must have a faith in herself that even surpassed his. She must take herself for granted, take him for granted, and the inevitableness of his love for her. But as yet her love was all dread and fear, every cloud that passed over his face, every change in his voice when he spoke affected her. She who did not know how to compromise, who could never resign herself to a modification of love, who would be the first one to say love was dead, when it was only a little tired perhaps, how was she to meet the eternal fact, so often drilled into the patient and sad hearts of people, of love's satiety, love's disillusionment?

But as the months succeeded one another, her peace became deeper. The pride of love replaced love's humility. She dared many things now, herself not conscious that there was any change in her conduct towards him, though she felt vibrantly her greater happi-

ness, looked clad as with splendour because of it, felt strong as it seemed to her no human being on earth could ever have felt because of the inspiration of their love. She dared now appear just as she was, no longer with the instinctive desire to be better in his eyes.

"Violette," Gervais asked one day, "how can you love me so wonderfully? Why, Violette? Why?" It was an old question. A tremulous smile played over her face. "My mother gave me this legacy," she said; "this love of mine began perhaps when love was born in her."

She felt for him almost the intimacy that comes from marriage—he was hers, she understood him, so much so that she was astonished every time she looked at him that he was objective at all. It was a time when she drank deep from the sources of life, when she was at the height of her power, and always there was the feeling that there was more to be felt and had, more to be given. The strange sad thoughts that had often lain like

a weight on her heart were dissipated like mist before the sun. She was beginning to understand not only the courage to live but the courage to perpetuate life. There was the dim foreshadowing of vital things. She felt the subterranean sea which tossed beneath life and she wanted to go out into the world, proclaiming, "Let us free youth! Let us free age." Her feeling was that life could be lived so much more fully—there was so much more to be had, to be felt, to be explored. She felt the loneliness of the eternal feminine.

The time would come of her grandfather's death,—the time would come when she would be waiting for the new-born,—the time would come when natural laws and forces would hold her in their grasp. All the more must she love then! It took wisdom and experience, she thought, to understand happiness, not the cheap happiness of contentment and success, but real happiness, the happiness of achievement which often

looks like failure. If she had not known sorrow, she thought, she could not have been so ready for happiness, so eager for it as the parched soil for rain, the flower for sunshine.

Neither her grandfather nor her friend could feel that Violette would have joy of her first love. He had been weary unto death—would he not grow mortally ill again and forsake her when she had forgotten how to live without him? They thought this even when they saw Violette, under the spell of that rarest of all happiness—triumphant first love—going with Gervais for their walk in Père Lachaise, her white veil fluttering in the wind, a smile playing on her lips; when they heard her call herself a captive of Spring; and when they saw her stretch her arms out wide to the skies above her; when she told them how she had stayed with him at the tomb of Rachel and had asked, “Do you see me with my love, oh, elder sister?”

But for him love and death had already been; and if all the happiness of life were

placed in his hands, they thought, he would not know what to do with it. As some strong natures are prepared for death, so he seemed to them prepared to forego her, for life to him was neither a banquet nor a spectacle—it was warfare. What had he to do with love, they asked in anguish of heart.

So the dream went on and people wondered about Violette who now sat with the great and was wooed and courted, and she revelled in her good fortune with a heart half-surprised, half-expectant. Critics wrote extensively about her. Artists and sculptors sought her. "It must be half divine," wrote a celebrated man about her, "to be young, to be beautiful, and to be devoted to a great cause!" The world adopted the orphan, returned her love a thousandfold, but her renown did not cross her consciousness. She was taken up entirely with other things. Somewhere she knew a free world existed—if only in the minds of a few. Better than she loved her art she loved a certain ideal of

hers concerning the world at large, a dream that had come to her when twining the wire for wreaths—that every one in the world should have a chance for happiness and growth. This thought laid a spell on her which never lifted. It was because of this that she became an actress or fell in love or did any of the things that really expressed her. She could not have cared to live had not this thought of human betterment been present. It was a vision and a prophecy that she carried in her heart, and when she got older, she found that others confirmed her hope and strove to make it true, laying all on its altar gladly, and even going down in darkness to the grave in order to prove it.

IV

BARRIERS

VIOLETTE and Gervais were walking arm in arm in Père Lachaise. It was spring. Every blade of grass seemed sentient, every tree proud of its green, the perfumed air hummed of mystic beginnings, of deep stirrings and passions.

Her eyes met the eyes of her lover, and it seemed to her that she was lost in him, that meanings became fathomless, and time and space receded, and she stood held by joy. But he exclaimed, "I shall never forget your love!" and she had the foreboding of doom that she had often felt in her happiest moments with him.

There was a barrier between him and her.

But love itself creates a barrier, she thought,—love which leads one to contem-

plate one's love in silence, which makes one unable to impart one's feeling to the other, which makes one live a separate existence just at the point where the divided life is ended forever, love which is the most individual experience of the soul.

Their love was her achievement. She had held out her hands to him, had rushed out to him; at the most terrible moment in his night she had been present; she had chosen him, she had compelled him to choose her—by all the subtle and mighty power of her youth she had drawn him to her heart. To her he was the ineffable soul, the ideal face behind all the faces.

But he had loved before! The deathless memory of another possessed him. He could not repeat his experience of love. Nature's economy would not permit it. Was this the barrier that she felt? Some day she would be brave enough to ask him and he would answer her with his unfailing courage and truth.

Beyond the faces applauding and approving her Violette saw always his face. She knew that he also saw a face—her face—but she was aware that he saw faces behind it. Behind her stood victims, and behind those, others and still others—pinched, pale women, despairing men, ragged and sickly children. They pressed round her on every side, almost effaced her. She thought she saw him reach his arms to the multitude and cry he was coming, and she thought she saw how her own face faded from his sight. The sick man she had made whole was using his strength against her.

She could not misunderstand or overlook anything about him, since only large forces played a part in his life. She could see him away from her, arid of love, sterile of hunger and yearning, barren of need. She could feel that he looked upon her beautiful youth as pure delight, and that because of this he shut his heart to her. In fancy she pleaded with him: "The cemetery is my

background—do you blame me for not having let it swallow me up? Was it not well that I struggled up from the abyss? I am not a breath of spring, a flush of dawn, a feather fallen from the wing of night—I am a human being. I am not a shadow, not a reflex of some beauty of a passing season, not an echo of nature, but a human being.

“You are afraid of my eagerness, afraid of my happiness, but I am only a simple girl, and I too have the strength to surrender my happiness. I can lay down everything if the moment arrives. I may not always remain brilliant, I may grow listless, disheartened. You can not bear my youth—try to imagine my age, and see if you cannot love me as I may be when I am older, or when I am old. See if you cannot love me when my heart breaks.

“I am like everybody else. Everybody lives within hailing distance of Père La-

chaise. All are children, nursed in the lap of age, potentially artists, potentially lovers.

“People have snatched moments from the scaffold for love, have loved when they had but an hour of life to live, an hour of measured death.”

She understood why he was able to resist her inward happiness. She could not have wished him to be different, and yet how unalterably different from him she was in the consecration of her whole life to personal expression, and personal development. In her love of love how different she was from him! When she pictured herself living for him, he for her, their lives a pæan sung for each other, an interplay of drama, their eyes meeting across all possible human experiences—how different she was! Was it the difference of man and woman? she asked, or was it the difference of youth and maturity? She could not wish him to be like

herself, nor could she wish herself to change.

It came upon Gervais like an illness of the body that he must flee Violette, that he must go away and take up the burden where he had laid it down a year ago on the quay. With the end of spring came an end of the dream. It died out suddenly, so without struggle of any kind that for a while Violette did not believe it was gone, did not trust the uneasiness that assailed her, the clamouring hunger that tore through her for something that Gervais had given her and was now withholding from her. She felt a change.

In a certain sense Violette was not strong. She could not have fought for herself. Her mind would see clearly what was to be said and demanded, but so gently had she brought herself up, dwelt so long on the history of human folk, lingered on the threshold of other people's lives with such sympathy, that, when attacked, she was in-

capable of defence. What mattered it if in her heart she was a stoic? What mattered it if she said that no one but herself could ever put an affront upon her, what mattered it if her pride as an individual forestalled even that possibility of any one invading the precincts of her nature as long as there was lacking in her the power to hurt people when they hurt her, the talent to strike back, to meet hardness with hardness?

Père Lachaise had unfitted her for this. Others might be hasty and shortsighted, might act rashly as if they had all eternity with which to make amends; others might forget, but not she!

"I do not need happiness," she said. "It was a fantasy of my youth to imagine that I did. I can live as the millions and millions of people do who have little happiness, or who perhaps have never had any, upon whom no one leans, for whom no one yearns. I can be all alone, although for a long time

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now I had supposed myself to be two in one,
to be mystically united in love with another.
I do not need happiness, but something tells
me that happiness is possible just the same.”

V

LOST

THE day rose in humid heat and grew more oppressive every hour. Paris lay under a glaring sun, inert, hardly breathing, in cruel suspense for the evening's cool.

Violette awaited Gervais.

"We will not have the strength. It will be impossible," she reiterated to herself, and she did not try to fight off the languor which oppressed her. "Why could we not go on as before? What has happened?" But in another moment came a poignant sense of desertion, of one-sided love; for the first time in her life it seemed wiser to her to die than to live, and she started up in anguish, frightened, shaken. "I must not succumb to the first misery," she told herself.

And it was with this thought that she came into the room where he waited.

"Gervais," she began, "where are you going?"

"When I stood on the quay, Violette, I thought I saw the starved of all the world gather about me. They were not a clamorous lot, and I wondered at their silence. I wondered at their empty hands, for I knew that if the fate which has created the soul I possess had also made me a beggar, I should beg with a knife in my hands! Violette, that night I crossed the threshold of my personal existence. For a little while I forgot—through you—Violette."

Violette was at his side.

"So much I could say to you if I were older, stronger; so much perhaps that would be truer too than it now can be. You come to me with your doctrines and theories, but I come with my whole life, with my thoughts, with my heart. The days in my childhood when I suffered hunger, the isolation, the

nights of torture seeking in my own thoughts answers that I knew existed somewhere—is it all as nothing?”

“You are meant for happiness, Violette,” he said.

For a long time they sat silent, their hands in each other’s, and then they arose and passed into the inner room to her grandfather.

“Friend,” the old man said, looking long at Gervais, “you will yearn to come again. But the way is long.”

Gervais turned to Violette, but she could not speak, for her soul seemed to call to him. With blinded eyes he passed through the door.

VI

NIGHT AND DAWN

VIOLETTE thought she was in her bed at home looking out upon the stars through the open window facing her, but when she saw the tombs and the rows of nodding trees she remembered. It was Père Lachaise. She sighed and sank back on the green bank. The night was warm.

She wondered if any girl as alive as she had ever spent the night in Père Lachaise. Never had Violette been more alive—not even in the spring when she had sat on this spot with Gervais. The smell of the grass on which she lay was sweet to her, the flowers, the far starlight, the little cloud toward the east. It was wonderful to be there in the still beauty of the night and think bravely.

in the silence, and gather the hopes like flowers and count them as one would count stars, aware only that they were innumerable, that they were brilliant and distant. No, Violette was never quite so happy! If only she could find some way to tell Gervais that it was well with her, but in time he would know. He would hear how she had fulfilled her destiny, and been an artist from beginning to end. Perhaps he would be there some day, sitting in the gloom of the theatre, the face beyond the faces, and he would guess that she saw him and played to him, and be no longer sorry that he had been unable to take her gift of herself, and sit dreaming of fair days, of a promised spring, of starlit nights, and sweetness and passion and converse. Perhaps he would yet come to know how wonderful a thing it was to live—when it would be too late for happiness.

Her heart beat painfully and she raised herself slowly and looked past the trees far into the night. She walked towards the

tomb of Rachel lying to the left. She would come like a younger sister to Rachel and speak with her. Violette's feet gleamed on the grass. Dew hung on them like gems, dew glistened in her hair that swept downwards to her waist, dew was on her eyes and cheeks. She stopped and threw her arms out towards the sky, and her face changed as with a sudden memory of pain, and "Gervais" fell from her lips. Then she went on.

"There is no one here," she said.

Violette's eyes sought the window of her room across the street. She saw it by the faint glimmer of candle light that burned behind it. Perhaps the candle was at that moment in the hand of her grandfather.

The night grew deeper, darker.

Here in Père Lachaise, she thought, was surcease without interruption, peace past understanding. Here there was no love which woke and tortured you throughout the night.

The stars hung high above her, the leaves

fell like tears on her head, the silence was impenetrable as death. She stood by the tomb of Abelard and Heloise. "Their sleep is dreamless," said Violette. "Her spirit went out like a candle when Abelard left her for the cold preferment of the church. She was able to let him leave her because he had already left her." And then she thought, "What is this love for which we are sick to death and which yet makes us so strong? I have forgotten. What do I want with Gervais? What did I want with his love? I cannot remember."

Père Lachaise lay white in the starlight. It took on a deeper silence with the advancing hours. Violette wondered whether the dead grew weary and rose to stretch their arms and to look upon the night. "It is sad," she thought, "that it should be easier to find death than love," and suddenly her thought deserted Gervais. He no longer stood for love. It was love itself she saw, not the half-tortured, strangled thing he


turned it into—love as she felt it before his coming, added to her riper knowledge of it since his leaving. And now, she, a lover of love, lay there bleeding.

Violette went to the farther end of the cemetery, where suddenly she came upon Rachel, who stood and played to all the dead of Père Lachaise. If ever Violette met Gervais again (and she knew that it could not be), she would tell him how Rachel played in the starlight to herself and all the dead. About her heart cold as ice the words of the actress leaped like flames of joy. Violette remembered her grandfather, and she was overcome by the greatness of his love for her as by the grandeur of God. She remembered her whole childhood—it flowed like a river at her feet. She went back into rooms of her vanished life, opening door upon door. She remembered Gervais. Mirrored in Rachel's luminous eyes she saw rain and storm and sunshine, and she loved these things for them-

selves as she did when she was a child. From Rachel's voice, her tears, her laughter, there came to her a vague wonder which soon turned into a feeling, an assertion. She wanted to live. She wanted to wander forth into the mazes of life, secure in her knowledge that she could endure the unendurable.

The dawn crept up from the east. The stars paled. A little cloud drifted towards her. The breaking day called her. But it seemed to her that Rachel pitied her weariness and detained her, prevailing upon her to lie down on the grass beside her and crooning a lullaby over her of such sweetness that she could not help but sleep.

At dawn when she stole back to her room, she had a poignant sense of having escaped from some imminent tragedy. How if she had never waked? How if her grandfather had found her there stark on the grass at the foot of the sepulchre? How if he had sunk down by her side striving to reach with



his remaining strength the source of the sorrow that had carried her past his age to an early death—what could he have done but died? Always there had been this thing or that of importance but now it could be only death. Ah, but she had not succumbed. How could she succumb when the mother survives her baby, the wife her husband? It was happiness merely to give love, in fancy to bear Gervais her tenderness through voice and look and touch, to carry him fervour and glowing thought, to give him every heart-beat of her youth, every ray of her smile, all the dew of her tears. Even though he feared her free gifts, her thoughts would seek him, her life would seek to share its brief hours with him. Sometime she would find him again, and he her, sometime when they were both old, in the barren years! And then she prayed: “I throw myself on the heart of the Wind, in the arms of the Sea; I strain my eyes towards the face of the Night. Life, I am in your hands.”

She knew now the aspiration of the heart for the eternal persistence of that which is dear and beloved. It was not possible that Gervais should die. That in him which strove towards the world, which bore relation to his kind, would always live in ineffable but certain ways, carrying its message to generations and generations of men, merging itself with the life of the future—even after she who bore him in her heart was herself laid away, even after the last memory of him had perished, a voice of his spirit, as incarnated in his work, his speech, his groping feelings, his silent thought, would still be heard somewhere in the recesses of the world. He would be immortal. He would bridge the past and the future. He would be universal, a flash of life to the end.

VII

PROPHECY

HE will come back," said her grandfather. But Violette knew that he would not come back. Whatever else life held for her, it did not hold him. Long hours dragged their weight across her heart, and she knew that just so would it be throughout the years—long nights of long years, in which she would lie thinking of Gervais.

It seemed to her as if all the crises of her life were swallowed up in oblivion. Only yesterday she had had a need to speak of them to her friend. Now she herself consigned them to forgetfulness—she let the soul of them perish. At last she understood what age was.

But there was another age too, an age of

pleasant valleys, or reminiscence. That was the age she had believed in when she was young. But now she let everything go—her hope, her sorrow, her wildest, bravest aspiration. The past claimed them. She opened her fingers and let them fall like violets into an open grave.

But why? she asked, since she knew that as long as he lived there could be no separation between them. There was something beyond the close contact, the walking hand in hand through the charmed mazes of life, the being within hourly reach of each other's presence. Something beyond the nearness of love, which seemed the ultimate bliss of existence, the last, dearest sweetness. There was something left beyond this, and that was the colossal idea that they were both alive together in the world.

"We will meet in the air we breathe, in the work we do, in the exigencies of the social forces that inspire us; we will meet in the achievements of the future; we will meet

in the culminating events of our own individual existences—in whatever triumph of personal development awaits us, in whatever latent strength life will evolve in us, in whatever moment of inspiration will be vouchsafed us; we will meet, if not during our lives, then at the end, in a glorious consummation of all we have ever been.”

Violette smiled tearfully as she thought this. “What is such consolation?” she wondered. “It is as if already I had grown old, already become resigned to the possession of a millionth part of that for which my soul yearned.”

Violette thought of the attitude of the old to Père Lachaise. To them, too, life passes like a dream, life passes, yet it is not short! They look back upon the years, and it seems as if they had come a long way, as if the road had been interminable, as if the end they saw in sight in their youth as far away, was far away still. The old are not afraid of Père Lachaise. They think with strange

serenity about it. It is not a terrible commentary upon life to them that it exists. Sometimes they think it even desirable, not because they are tired, but because they see in it a harmony, a lyrical and loving law of the universe, an explanation of mystery, a marriage of cause and effect. The old go to Père Lachaise bravely, smilingly, and if they have never known gladness before, they know it then. To them it is a final step in which there cannot be failure or wrong. They achieve rest.

How different from her, who had stood shivering in her youth before the spectacle of Père Lachaise, had feared it, as though from behind its tombs something might leap out and strike her down, had gazed at her grandfather with anguish and terror, had let dread of death fill her heart from her earliest childhood.

She had thought of the destiny of the people from the standpoint of Père Lachaise, that those who were bereft of the fulness of

life in their one lifetime could never be compensated, that the wrong done them was unforgivable because irreparable. Whenever she had thought of death by law, by war, by want, she had thought of something so unnatural that it poisoned the air she breathed, darkened the sun, made her hate a world where it existed, made her think with rapture of a chance to give her life, with all it held, in the effort to destroy it. She had thought of art from the standpoint of Père Lachaise. It was an effort to invest this short duration of existence which leads only to the grave with beauty, to discover its dignity, to find where it was most intense. Her love, too, was inspired by Père Lachaise, marked deep by its sign. She had loved her lover as if he were a child whose flickering life she was nursing on her breast. For death had struck at him and crushed him, death might again attack some one he loved, to whom he belonged. Death might slay him before her eyes. She had thought al-

ways of how short a time at best they would be together.

Life was but a span, and she rebelled against its brevity, against the terrible fact that it had to end, that it had to sink together and crumble up, become ashes scattered to the winds—life which was so sweet, so full of plan and purpose, of passionate endeavour, passionate courage and hope and love—life which was so true and real that it was hard to believe in it, and one could only feel it as a dream, be borne aloft on its tossing waves as in a gentle sleep—life had an end!

Her heart could not bear it, her mind refused to grasp it.

She must gather the roses immediately, tragically she must abandon herself to an intense enjoyment of life, making sure she did not let one drop of the cup go undrained.

Now her soul was filled with a new valor, now when life sought to crush her by robbing her of her dream of love, she grew at home in life, fell deeply in love with it. Now that

she met life in collision, seemingly at cross purposes with it, she loved and honoured it in a thousand new ways. Her courage was at last tested. Now she understood inspiration—it was the exalted attitude of the spirit before the spectacle of life, the final union with existence, the complete harmony. And the end of inspiration was to give oneself, and yet to remain oneself, to be an individual, never to become a replica of old and preceding forms, but to be a life not before beheld in nature—a romantic, new, free type, a spirit at once like every other that has ever lived, and different from every other, an original human being. This was the harvest she reaped from her ordeal, that she no longer looked at life from the standpoint of Père Lachaise, but at Père Lachaise from the standpoint of life.

Death was not a part of life—it was an alien, an intruder, so unlike to life, so strange and out of place in her eternity that she could see it and live amidst it and yet go on

as if it did not exist. Yet she could not conceive of life without death, and she did not want fadeless flowers, ageless youth, dawns that did not bring forth the days of which the nights in turn were born. She could not think of her love enduring timelessly in her unchanging heart.

Death was the theatre in which all existence played its drama, the stage upon which life was set. But death, at this time, stood to her not for death, but for the sorrow of death, the weeping through long, blind nights, the torturing memories, the wending of weary feet, and wearier heart, toward a far grave. It stood for unendurable and unutterable suffering, the heart crying murder at life itself.

Sometimes she would go to her grandfather's room when he was asleep, terrified by the thought that he would suddenly be snatched from her. She would stand in the window that looked out on Père Lachaise. The trees would nod in the night, the dark

beckon to her—Père Lachaise, lit with stars, would seem to be waiting. Then she felt that life was an oasis in the midst of death, and she craved to extend her life, to join those who belonged to her and to whom she belonged; she wanted to huddle together with comrades as before a storm. She was still a lonely child, who had too early made the acquaintance of death.

For many months all her thoughts were of Gervais. He was wandering somewhere in the world, homeless, detached, self-forsaken. Why had she not been able to persuade him that love with her need not have meant a surrender of principle and idealism, only a mere happiness of two, only a hearth, a shelter against the world, something circumscribed, personal, and abstracted from life? Why could she not have convinced him that she would live as he did, without thought of self or art; would live as he, the wanderer, the lost one, was living now. Ah, but the young do not speak, she thought. They

stand abashed, silent, they do not know how to defend themselves. Later, she could have made him see that her way was better, that to live and to build up happiness upon happiness even for one person in the world is also worth striving for. Had she been older, stronger, she could have taught him to be happy. What was her art if it was not the expression of an avid hunger for life, of suffering, too, of enthusiasm and inspiration? What was her youth but hunger? Because she was young and an artist he had not been able to believe that she could immolate herself! Had she remained a simple child of the people, in the shadow of Père Lachaise, with her artist's soul hidden within her like a seed that had not germinated, she could have held him—his voice, his mind, his weary heart, all for her own.

She would live a long time in the world and later, years later, she felt there would be no face beyond the faces for her, but something graver, something that would take the

place of the personal need and the personal appeal. And she would continue to refuse to be the conservator of traditional feelings and ideas, to refuse to be the guardian of the past. She must ever be an adventurer toward the new and untried, an explorer of the future. She would continue to insist on her right to conquest in new fields, new doctrines, new faiths, new tactics, new programmes of action; she would continue to dare venture forth with a few or alone, to the ends of the earth, wherever the truth might lead her. Before being a woman she would be a human being. In this way, though hurt and suffering, she would school herself not to miss him, never to wish to look into his eyes, never to long to press her lips to his, never to think of him, her constant thought.

A vibrant consciousness of the universality of life was upon her—a democracy of race and nation and time—as in childhood she had felt that she was a child and had infinite years to live. The human world when it attained

maturity would attain to freedom. She absolved people. She did not hold them responsible for the wrongs they suffered or inflicted; she warred upon conditions but never upon people themselves, for they were guiltless. She had learned this basic truth at the meetings and in the pamphlets when she was a child, and it was a philosophy of tolerance which suited her nature well. "How could I bring my art to people if I thought them guilty of their own misfortunes? How could I forgive them enough to play before them, whoever they were—the unknown audiences I face and adore!" To her they all at least wished to be apostles of love and freedom, whether they were the oppressed or the oppressors. They had been created by forces that transcended them. Individually, they were helpless. It was only when they saw how to unite themselves with their kind, which was the purpose and the inspiration of life, that they would become invincible. Then they would have freedom.

to soar, to love, to create—freedom to conceive higher and higher human experiences, new forms of social and individual existences.

Violette, walking home from the Academy to the narrow crowded street and half-decayed house in which she still lived, passing hundreds of such where dwelt families as poor as her own had been, was accompanied by such thoughts. Her eyes dwelt on the children playing about her. She saw in them the race, the future, immortality on earth, to whom all things belonged.

The movement for human emancipation—it existed somewhere. It had no boundaries. Wherever the idea dwelt, there it lived and sought to incarnate itself as a social force. Everywhere throughout the world, hosts of unknown men and women were ready for the freer and richer life, and were preparing the ground that others might become so. She was one of them. She felt she could trust herself. Her passionate, romantic affirma-

tion of life led her straight to them, to those who insisted that all must live freely, greatly, as no one has ever lived before.

Gervais had been quick to leave her. She had a life apart from the movement, which to him made her like the rest of the people in the world. But he was wrong. She was one with him. She felt as invincible as the idea which inspired them. She and he were there in the world, transitional characters, giving proof to the present that the future from which they hailed and which their lives already expressed, could indeed come to pass.

The friend of her childhood was also one of these—a man beyond time, beyond nation, beyond race, wholly emancipated from the spell of the past. He came every night to the theatre, if not to see the performance, then at the end to take her home, and again as in her childhood, their speech was always of the movement, the movement which held her ardent faith, and which she knew existed, but the sources of which she had not yet been

able to find. Now, though she thrilled with her ever-growing power in her art, and was made happy by the recognition she received—a recognition which was to her in itself dramatic—her mind sought work with the people, work that should incarnate the truth by which she lived, the love with which she had become infatuated.

As she looked into the future she saw her own future unroll itself before her. There was a deep and intimate relation between her life and that other world life about which her thoughts revolved. Her years would be shaped by the forces with which she was already allied, her whole life would take their stamp. Already she foresaw acts that carried her far, deeds that would be expressive of the struggle of the classes in which she would take a direct part. Dimly she foresaw that she would be called upon to play her part in this greatest of all dramas. She wished it to be so. But it would not mean abdication of her own personal exist-

ence; it must augment everything that had ever begun in her; it must always mean the full flowering of her whole personality. Out of it would be created her love and her motherhood.

When another autumn came she watched the fall of leaves—the crimson whirl in the air, the brilliant maples grouped about the white birch trees which were being stripped before her eyes by the breeze. Never did anything seem so beautiful, so right. She had looked at the marvellous foliage for a season of two weeks, nature had decorated herself, was celebrating some sacred approaching event—death, perhaps, and now she stood rapt and spellbound by the flaming vistas before her, feeling that all life was something more than she had known, that glories and splendours were the daily bread of existence. In a passionate downpour of leaves, the advance of death began, and she felt how right it was, how timely—she had no re-

grets, would not impede the fall of one of them.

Why could not all death be beautiful like this? When her time came, she too could deck herself out marvellously! She could summon more thoughts from out the recesses of her mind, memories that should be more than memories, charged with a vital force to persist, to act; she could array herself at the end in the full flowering of all that had ever begun in her. Feelings from the heart, warm, palpitant, red as the sap in these leaves, could mount to her cheeks and eyes, make them flash and shine, could curve her lips with smiles of transcendent tenderness; then, thoughts, memories, and feelings would circle gloriously in a rhythmic dance above her head, visions and people better than visions would press close to her, her heart would leap and flutter, her hands would search and find, and gladly, joyously, beauteously, she would surrender all, let

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them be carried out by gentle winds to impregnable regions while she herself sank to the ground, a symbol, a token, a pledge of love and life, like each brilliant leaf then descending.

THE END



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